An investigation into factors contributing towards employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment

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# Executive summary and recommendations

## Overview of the project

The objective of this project has been to improve understanding of factors which contribute towards positive employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment, with a particular interest in those living/ working within Greater London. A key aim of the project is to inform the grant making activities of Vision Foundation; to ensure that any grants are being allocated to support evidence-based activities.

This summary report outlines findings in relation to two key activities:

1. A rapid literature review

2. Focus group consultations with 23 representatives from the Greater London area.

## Summary of key findings

### Research evidence into the employment outcomes of individuals with vision impairment

There is limited research evidence of which interventions are most successful in supporting individuals with vision impairment towards positive employment outcomes. The majority of employment-related literature focuses instead on the barriers which are faced by this population as they seek to enter the labour market and participate in the workplace. This highlights the importance of further research into what interventions are most effective, as well as the value of organisations offering employment support reporting on the outcomes of the services they offer.

### Enablers and barriers

Individuals with vision impairment face significant barriers in accessing the labour market. These are multifaceted and can relate to barriers within the person (such as their skillset or levels of self-determination), societal barriers (such as stigmatisation of persons with vision impairment) and programmatic barriers (such as a lack of signposting to key services and the inaccessibility of Access to Work). One of the strongest themes which emerged through the focus group discussions were the barriers faced due to a lack of understanding of vision impairment from employers and Jobcentre Plus staff. Both the research literature and the experiences of the focus group participants highlights the importance of working with employers and service providers to educate them on vision impairment, thereby overcoming negative attitudes.

### Positive interventions

Whilst there is limited evidence of which types of interventions lead to the most positive employment outcomes, both the research literature and the focus group discussions highlighted the importance of assessing the individual to ascertain in what areas support is required. This in turn should lead to a bespoke programme to help support the individual to be able to participate in the labour market. This might include, for example, support to develop key skills (such as mobility and orientation or computer skills), counselling to help in acceptance of vision impairment, or support to develop self-advocacy skills. Both the focus groups and literature highlighted the importance of mentoring, both research evidence showing that this can be a positive experience for both the mentee and the mentor. Vision impairment organisations also play an important role in helping improve employer’s knowledge of vision impairment, which in turn can help overcome negative attitudes.

### Future directions

Focus group participants identified several priorities for the vision impairment sector to help to address some of the barriers and enablers that had been identified during the discussion. These include:

* The vision impairment sector leading by example, by employing a higher proportion of individuals with vision impairment. This should include both long-term roles and the creation of short-term opportunities.
* Increased mentoring services, including mentoring for older adults.
* Providing tailored support for individuals who wish to set up their own businesses.
* Raising awareness of vision impairment across society.

## Summary of recommendations

### Addressing gaps in evidence

1. For providers of vision impairment employment support services to report on the outcomes of their interventions, thus improving knowledge within the sector.

2. For further academic research to be undertaken to improve knowledge of which types of interventions can support individuals with vision impairment into the employment.

### Improving employment support service provision within the vision impairment sector

3. For employment support services to offer a holistic service, addressing the specific needs of the individual. For example, this might include providing technology training, facilitating work experience opportunities, helping the individual’s acceptance of their vision impairment and facilitating the development of self-advocacy skills.

4. For employment support services to offer early interventions for individuals who have lost, or are in danger of losing their job; particularly if they have recently experienced sight loss.

### Policy and campaigns

5. For charities representing persons with vision impairment to lobby for improvements to the accessibility of Access to Work.

6. For charities representing persons with vision impairment to lobby for improved provision through Jobcentre Plus, including raising the aspirations for staff for vision impaired job seekers.

7. For charities representing persons with vision impairment to lobby for employers and recruiters to improve the accessibility of job application processes.

8. For vision impairment charities to lead by example and employ a greater proportion of individuals with vision impairment.

9. For vision impairment charities to identify ways in which to work with employers, trade and professional organisations, and unions to improve understanding of vision impairment.

### Priority areas for addressing gaps in services

10. For vision impairment charities to facilitate individuals with vision impairment to access work experience opportunities, including internships and voluntary placements.

11. Mentoring schemes, including schemes which link vision impaired job seekers with non-disabled employers, as well as with others with a vision impairment. In particular, gaps in mentoring provision for older job seekers (26+) should be addressed.

12. Provision of tailored support for individuals who wish to set up as self-employed.

13. Provision of vision impairment awareness training sessions within the workplace to facilitate the inclusion of vision impaired employees. This can be funded through Access to Work.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the participants who contributed to the focus group discussions for providing such a rich account of their experiences of what it is like to navigate the labour market as a person with a vision impairment. We would also like to thank Vision Foundation for funding this important piece of work and for the support they provided throughout.

# Introduction

The objective of this project was to improve understanding of factors which contribute towards positive employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment, with a particular interest in those living/ working within Greater London. A key aim of the project is to inform the grant making activities of Vision Foundation; to ensure that any grants are being allocated to support evidence-based activities.

The key research questions identified by Vision Foundation which we have sought to address within this report were:

1. Who is at most risk of unemployment?
2. What can be done about this?
3. What types of interventions aimed at individuals with a vision impairment have good outcomes and why?
4. Are there good employment programmes aimed *not* at individuals with a vision impairment which can be replicated?
5. What does best practice look like?
6. What can be done to improve the situation?
7. What policy changes are needed?

This summary report outlines findings in relation to two key activities:

1. A rapid literature review

2. Focus group consultations with 23 representatives from the Greater London area.

In Section 3 we provide an overview of the methodology followed when conducting the rapid literature review, including describing the protocol used and explaining how we approached categorising and reviewing the evidence.

In Section 4 we present our finding of the rapid literature review, by providing a summary of the research evidence identified to enable us to answer four key questions:

1. Which factors can determine how likely an individual with vision impairment is to have positive outcomes in the labour market?
2. Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation have been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace?
3. Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation have been successful in helping individuals with disabilities develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market?
4. How are individuals with vision impairment included in the labour market? What evidence do we have of the barriers and enablers to both within society and within the workplace?

In Section 5 we outline the methodology used for the focus groups, including the approach taking in recruitment participants, the demographics of the 23 participants who took part, and an overview of the process followed and the questions which were explored during the focus group discussions.

In Section 6 we present a summary of the key findings from the focus groups. These are grouped as follows:

* Positive employment-related outcomes
* Barriers, enablers and strategies to employment
* Programmatic barriers – Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus
* Future directions – priorities for the future

In Section 7 we draw conclusions by reflecting back on the initial research questions posed, before drawing together the findings of this research project to provide recommendations and key messages for stakeholders in Section 8.

Finally in the Appendix in Section 10 we provide summaries of the papers which were reviewed as part of the rapid literature review.

Throughout the report we have drawn upon language such as ‘individual with vision impairment’ and ‘persons with disabilities’. We have chosen to use this person-first language because it recognises that the individual is not defined by their disability.

# Rapid literature review: methodology

## Protocol used in literature search

This section lays out the framework used in the literature review. It includes:

* search term strings
* platforms and databases
* inclusion criteria: sources
* inclusion criteria: VI literature

general disability

### Search term strings

The search term strings identified for the rapid literature review are listed below. They were developed, with input from Vision Foundation, to take into consideration the language used when describing vision impairment and employment interventions.

(“visual\* impair\*” OR “low vision” OR “sight loss”) AND (employ\* OR unemploy\*)

(blind NOT (colo?rblind OR double-blind)) AND (employ\* OR unemploy\*)

(blind NOT (colo?rblind OR double-blind)) AND recruit\*

“work program\*” AND (employ\* OR unemploy\*)

disab\* AND (employ\* OR unemploy\*) AND intervention

### Platforms and databases

Following guidance from the University of Birmingham’s Library Services the search platforms and databases below were used to identify papers using the search term strings identified above:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Platform** | **Databases** |
| Ebsco | Cinahl Plus |
| ProQuest | Social Science Premium Collection |
| Scopus | *Entire platform* |
| Web of Science | Social Sciences Citation Index |

### Inclusion criteria: sources

We sought to identify only papers from peer reviewed academic journals and those from professional journals as the table shows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Inclusion criteria** | **Exclusion criteria** |
| Peer reviewed academic journals | Websites not hosted by a recognised organisation as determined by the reviewers. Decision making will be documented. |
| Professional journals | Personal blogs |
|  | Personal opinions of interventions (presented online) |
|  | Newspapers |
|  | Students’ work, PhD and Masters dissertations |
|  | Book chapters which don’t present empirical evidence |

### Inclusion criteria: VI literature and general disability literature

Further inclusion and exclusion criteria was also applied to date of publication of the papers, the language used, the geographical location of where the papers were from, and focus of the type of disability covered in the paper. Knowing that papers focusing on general disability would be numerous, the decision was made to only include papers on general disability from the United Kingdom, whereas vision impairment specific papers were included even if international. The tables below show the inclusion and exclusion criteria for VI literature and general disability literature:

**VI literature**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Inclusion criteria** | **Exclusion criteria** |
| **Date** | 1995 and after (in line with the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act) | Published before 1995 |
| **Language** | English | Languages other than English |
| **Geographical location** | OECD | Countries outside of the OECD |
| **Disability** | Must be about VI | Non-VI literature |

**General disability literature**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Inclusion criteria** | **Exclusion criteria** |
| **Date** | 1995 and after (in line with the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act) | Published before 1995 |
| **Language** | English | Languages other than English |
| **Geographical location** | United Kingdom | United Kingdom |

## Categorising the evidence

By following the search protocol described above, we identified an initial 605 papers. The abstract for each of these papers was reviewed in order to organise across five different categories of evidence, as summarised below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Title** | **Description** | **No.** |
| **Category 1** | Paper provides evidence of factors which can predict the employment outcomes of individuals with vision impairment. | This category refers to evidence of factors which can determine how likely an individual with vision impairment is to have positive outcomes in the labour market. | 18 |
| **Category 2** | Paper provides evidence of interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation for individuals with vision impairment to help them move closer to the labour market. | This category refers to evidence of interventions which have been put in place to help individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace. For example, this might include the development of technology skills and independent travel skills or general employability skills. | 53 |
| **Category 3** | Paper provides evidence of interventions and strategies of rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities in the United Kingdom to help them move closer to the labour market. | This category refers to evidence of interventions which have been put in place to help individuals with disabilities to develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace, specifically. For example, this might include development of technology skills and independent travel skills or general employability skills. | 33 |
| **Category 4** | Paper provides evidence of the inclusion of individuals with vision impairment in the labour market. | This category refers to general evidence of the inclusion of individuals with vision impairment in the labour market, including evidence of barriers and enablers to inclusion, both within society and within the workplace. | 159 |
| **Category 5** | All other papers (excluded from further analysis) | This category refers to papers which do not meet the criteria described above, or the original criteria for the literature search. | 342 |

## Reviewing the evidence

Following the categorisation of the papers identified using the paper abstracts, we downloaded the relevant articles and reviewed each article in turn, following pre-determined questions. Papers which on closer expectation did not meet our inclusion criteria were removed from further analysis or reassigned to different categories. The table below summarises the guiding question use for each category of evidence and the number of articles remaining in each category.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Title** | **Guiding question when reviewing literature in each category** | **No. after review** |
| **Category 1** | Paper provides evidence of factors which can predict the employment outcomes of individuals with vision impairment. | Which factors can determine how likely an individual with vision impairment is to have positive outcomes in the labour market? | 14 |
| **Category 2** | Paper provides evidence of interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation for individuals with vision impairment to help them move closer to the labour market. | Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation have been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market? What evidence supports the success (or otherwise) of these interventions and strategies? | 8 |
| **Category 3** | Paper provides evidence of interventions and strategies of rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities in the UK to help them move closer to the labour market. | Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation in the UK have been successful in helping individuals with disabilities develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market? What evidence supports the success (or otherwise) of these interventions and strategies? | 5 |

Due to the large number of papers identified for category 4, a selection of more significant and relevant papers were selected as part of a narrative review of evidence.

# Rapid literature review: findings

In this section we present our findings from the rapid literature review. These are presented according to the four guiding questions identified in section 3.

## Question 1: Which factors can determine how likely an individual with vision impairment is to have positive outcomes in the labour market?

This question explores evidence of factors which can be used to predict the likelihood of an individual with vision impairment having positive outcomes in the labour market. This includes individual characteristics and their previous life experiences. Whilst many of these factors are fixed, as argued by Goertz (2017), understanding such underlying factors provides important context when designing interventions to support individuals with vision impairment into employment.

Fourteen papers were identified through the literature review which fit into this category. A summary of these papers is presented within the Appendix.

### Research evidence relating to all working-age individuals with vision impairment

Eight of the identified papers present findings which relate to all working-age individuals with vision impairment. Several factors were identified and are listed in order of frequency:

* Qualification level – positive outcomes linked to higher level qualifications, such as degrees
* Additional disabilities – comorbidity linked to less positive outcomes
* Registration status – higher severity of vision impairment linked to less positive outcomes
* Communication skills – proficiency in various communication skills, such as braille and technology, linked to positive outcomes
* Gender – males more likely to have positive outcomes
* Support – two studies found that support through rehabilitation services or emotional support leads to positive outcomes, whilst one study found it can lead to negative outcomes. For another study it was mixed, those who received employment support had positive outcomes, but for those receiving support in relation to their disability (in this case all traumatic brain injury) it led to negative outcomes, perhaps because those who needed more disability specific support also faced more barriers to employment.
* Housing tenure – more likely to be in employment if a home owner
* Mobility skills – ability to get around independently linked to positive outcomes
* Acceptance of VI – a personal acceptance of disability linked to positive outcomes
* Living in metropolitan area associated with positive outcomes
* The longer an individual is away from employment the more difficult it is for them to re-enter the labour market

In order to interpret these findings, it is helpful to explore the impact of each variable on the employment outcomes of individuals with vision impairment. This is explored further in Table 1, which presents the odds ratio for each variable explored by Clements et al (2011). This analysis investigated the likelihood of registered blind and partially people in the UK being in work versus those who were unemployed or economically inactive.

**Table 1 Odds Ratios for being in work v unemployment/economically inactive, reproduced from Clements at al (2011).**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Odds ratio | Reference category |
| Sex (Male) | 1.59 | Female |
| Age 18 to 29 | 0.49 | 30-49 years |
| Age 50 to 64 | 0.41 | 30-49 years |
| Lives alone | 0.82 |  |
| Has children | 1.25 |  |
| Own home | 2.72 |  |
| Degree | 6.16 | No qualifications |
| A-levels | 2.24 | No qualifications |
| GCSE | 1.54 | No qualifications |
| Registration status (blind) | 0.69 | Partially sighted |
| Age of onset 30-49 | 0.55 | Up to 29 years |
| Age of onset 50-64 | 0.24 | Up to 29 years |
| Additional disability (one or more disabilities) | 0.50 | No other disability |

An odds ratio ‘represents the odds that an outcome will occur given a particular exposure, compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in the absence of that exposure’ (Szumilas, 2010, p227). Odds ratios may be interpreted as follows:

Odds ratio =1 – exposure does not affect the odds of outcome

Odds ratio > 1 – exposure associated with higher odds of outcome

Odds ratio <1 – exposure associated with lower odds of outcome (Szumilas, 2010, p227)

For example, the analysis found that individuals with a vision impairment who have a degree are approximately 6 times more likely to be employed than an individual with a vision impairment who does not have any qualifications.

### Research evidence relating specifically to young adults with a vision impairment

Six of the identified papers present findings specific to young adults with a vision impairment. Five of the papers present findings from large nationally representative surveys in the USA and UK and one a systematic review of evidence. Several factors were identified and are listed in order of frequency:

* Confidence to travel independently – a confidence in independent travel is linked to positive outcomes. One study also identified ability to travel (e.g. being located in areas with good transport networks) as a positive factor.
* Previous work experience – having had early work experience at a younger age associated with positive outcomes.
* Qualifications – higher qualifications such as degrees linked to positive outcomes. Conversely, those with lower qualifications more likely to identify as ‘long term sick or disabled’.
* Outcome expectations –higher expectations in life (such as likelihood of getting a job) linked to positive outcomes.
* Additionally, higher math and verbal aptitude, receiving parental support, having peer-social skills and being in good health all associated with positive outcomes.

## Question 2: Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation have been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market?

Our formal review of the papers initially coded under Category 2 found that many of the sources identified were not based on empirical research, instead often constituting thought pieces. After re-categorisation, this left 8 papers which met our original inclusion criteria.

***Antonelli et al (2018)*** conducted a year long study to investigate the impact of a mentee programme in USA. Twenty-six mentee/mentor pairs were established, with their outcomes compared to 25 individuals with vision impairment who were not assigned a mentee.All mentees and control group participants were students aged under 35 years of age, within one year of college graduation and with plans to seek employment. The mentors were aged 25 to 63 years old and were employed or recently retired, most (72.9%) had graduate degrees. The mentors, mentees, and comparison group students all had a vision impairment. Findings included:

* Whilst few significant differences were found between the experimental and control group, it was found that mentees may have been more focused and efficient in their job searches.
* Mentees may have benefitted from the advice of their mentors regarding how and where to seek employment and how to prepare for applying for work, which may have streamlined their efforts.
* A greater percentage of mentees than comparison students found jobs by searching on their own; comparison students tended to use employment agencies or recruiters.
* Mentees also significantly increased their assertiveness in job hunting and this increased assertiveness may have helped mentees to gain the confidence or skills needed to ask about job opportunities on their own.
* Positively, mentors and mentees both found the project valuable and more than 60% were still in contact one year after the project had finished.
* However, at the end of the study no statistically significant differences in the employment outcomes of the mentored group and comparison group were found.

***Bell (2012)*** also conducted a study to investigate mentoring as a form of intervention with transition for transition-age youth. In this USA based study forty-nine participants aged between 16 and 26 took part in a two-year mentoring programme, in which they were matched with mentors according to gender, career interests and geographic proximity. The mentors were adults with vision impairment who had achieved academic and career success. There was no control group for this study instead participants’ knowledge and attitudes in relation to employment were tested before beginning the programme, mid-way through, and at the end of the two years. Three measurements were used i) the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE), used to measure participants career knowledge and decision-making confidence, (ii) the Miller Hope Scale (MHS), used to measure the extent to which youths’ hope, aspirations, and/ or expectations for their future increased, and (iii) the Social Responsibility About Blindness Scale (SRBS), used to measure attitudes about blindness and associated expectations for individuals with blindness. Findings included:

* Mentoring led to significant increased efficacy, or confidence in being prepared to make decisions related to career seeking and decision making.
* Participants demonstrated greater hope during the 2 years, although the change was not statistically significant.
* A more positive attitude in relation to blindness was related to acceptance of or self-identification with disability and this in turn promotes a more hopeful look on life.
* A very strong effect for increased positive attitudes by being involved in the mentoring project was found.
* Males had greater levels of confidence/ efficacy at the post test stage than females in relation to career knowledge and decision making confidence on the CDMSE score. There was no significant differences on the MHS or the SRBS scores
* Across the three measures there was no statistical differences identified in relation to participant age or race.

***Crudden et al (2005)*** conducted focus groups with 43 rehabilitation providers in USA and drew upon their expertise to identify interventions which could improve employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment. The findings highlighted that:

* There is a need for employers to be educated about VI and how it affects the way in which persons with vision impairment function.
* Employers with no experience hiring people with VI are sometimes more willing to make their first job offer to a person who is seeking summer or temporary employment.
* It is important to encourage people with VI to answer the unasked questions e.g. about how they get around, do particular tasks, bring your tools and show how you use them.
* Rehabilitation providers must act as a resource and support system for individuals with VI and the employer.

***Ferronato and Ukovic (2014)*** conducted a smaller study consisting of two case studies of individuals with vision impairment who were receiving support from rehabilitation services in Australia. Despite the small scale, they used the evidence to make several recommendations for service providers. These include the need for:

* A range of services and interventions as well as ongoing dialogue with the service user.
* The service provider to develop a thorough understanding of the individual’s vision impairment through a comprehensive low vision and workplace assessment in order to identify appropriate interventions and services.
* Services to conduct a thorough evaluation to identify suitable opportunities for an individual, based upon a range of factors such as their skillset, interests, previous experience, education and physical needs.
* Individuals to be supported to develop a range of compensatory strategies as well as independent travel skills.

***Goertz et al (2017)*** conducted a telephone survey with 229 individuals with vision impairment with the objective of identifying factors which impact upon the employment outcomes of job seekers with vision impairment. As well as identifying examples of fixed factors (as presented under Question 1) they also identified three modifiable factors – mobility skills, acceptance of vision impairment and optimism for positive outcomes. The authors recommended that when employment service providers make initial assessments of their vision impaired clients that these factors should be taken into account. In particular they noted the importance of service providers working with their clients to “facilitate the acceptance of being blind or visually impaired" (p257).

***Leonard (2002)*** conducted a follow-up study with 60 individuals who had previously drawn upon vocational rehabilitation services. As well as providing evidence of fixed factors which impact upon employment outcomes, the study identified an association between positive employment outcomes and early intervention, thus concluding that it is important for employment support to be provided as early as possible.

***McDonnall et al (2020)*** explored vocational rehabilitation service provision for individuals with comorbid traumatic brain injury (TBI) and visual impairment. Analysis of US Rehabilitation Services Administration Case Service Report data from fiscal years 2013-2015 combined with interviews with 51 vocational rehabilitation workers identified:

* None of the vocational rehabilitation agencies provided a unique program or method for providing services to consumers with combined TBI and visual impairment.
* Some agencies had a specific method or procedure for providing services to consumers with TBI but nothing unique for those with TBI and visual impairment.
* Competitive employment rates for those with TBI and visual impairment varied dramatically by vocational rehabilitation agency.
* Concluded that it would be valuable for non-specialist services to receive training in vision impairment, to equip them for delivering this support.

***Wittich et al (2013)*** developed and adapted a 4 week pre-employment programme specifically designed for English-speaking individuals with VI, in French speaking Quebec. Effectiveness of this intervention, for the eight participants, was measured pre-programme, post-programme, and eight months after the intervention. The findings highlighted:

* The most important outcome measure was success in finding employment within eight months of the conclusion of the project. Five had found employment and, of those, four had maintained employment within the eight-month follow-up period (one full-time, three part-time). Two of those employed part-time had also returned to part-time education. An additional two participants chose to continue their education in order to improve their employability.
* Further research is needed as the participants in this study were not representative of those likely to take part in this programme e.g. they were more likely to have congenital/ early onset vision impairments, and had fewer training needs.
* The multidisciplinary approach, with opportunity to observe and share ideas, promoted better understanding of the skills and responsibilities of other team members. It facilitated shared understanding, language, and approach.
* Participants’ independence and/ or confidence differed depending on context e.g. someone might feel confident using technology but not so confident talking to peers.
* As participants became more at ease with themselves and their disability, they became more ready for work, and can focus on the employment search themselves.
* Key skills developed through the programme included computing skills and a broader range of communication skills.

The outcomes of this literature search highlight that there is a shortage of literature presenting evidence-based interventions and strategies for supporting individuals with vision impairment into employment. This demonstrates the importance of service providers evaluating and reporting upon the services they deliver to help develop an evidence base within the sector.

## Question 3: Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation in the UK have been successful in helping individuals with disabilities develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market? What evidence supports the success (or otherwise) of these interventions and strategies?

The review of the papers initially coded under Category 3 found that a number of the sources identified did not focus on intervention or strategies of (re)habilitation, instead often presenting the experiences of individuals with disabilities within the workplace. Furthermore 14 of the papers focused on a specific disability for example, arthritis, profound learning disabilities, or autism, it was felt that these provided a too narrow understanding of strategies of rehabilitation and were excluded from analysis, leaving just those papers which referred to disability in general. Consequently, after re-categorisation, this left 4 papers which met our original inclusion criteria, and two systematic reviews (Clayton et al, 2010; Clayton et al, 2011). After further analysis the data from Clayton et al (2010) was reported in the later paper (Clayton et al, 2011), consequently the former paper was excluded from analysis. Consequently 5 papers were coded within Category 3.

***Clayton et al (2011)*** provided a systematic review of papers published between 2002 and mid-2008 reporting on the employment effects and/or factors influencing the effectiveness of UK national-level interventions aimed at helping people into work in the open labour market who were not employed and were on some type of disability-related benefit. 31 papers which evaluated initiatives with an individual focus e.g. improving an individual’s employability or providing financial support in returning to work, rather than an environmental focus, were synthesised. The 31 papers were placed into three categories ‘interventions offering individual case management and job search assistance’ (n=27), ‘interventions offering financial incentives for disabled people’ (n=8), and ‘management of health conditions to improve fitness to work’ (n=7). (Papers may have been placed into more than one category.) The following three tables provide a brief description of the interventions covered in each of the categories and a short summary of the findings.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2 Summary of ‘interventions offering individual case management and job search assistance’Intervention** | **Description** | **Findings** |
| ONE Advisory Service (5 studies) | The ONE programme integrated the Employment Service and Benefits Agency into a single point of contact, tailored to the needs of individuals. A Personal Adviser was assigned to individuals to help them process their benefit claim and other services such as exploring job readiness, barriers to employment, and better-off calculations.  The programme was introduced in 12 pilot areas between 1999 and 2001. There were also three models of delivery: Basic, Call Centre and Private/ Voluntary Sector. | Employment of 16 hours or more per week for sick/disabled clients increased in both the intervention (24% to 28%) and comparison (20% to 25%) groups, but the difference was not statistically significant.  There was a significant (p < 0.001) increase in employment outcomes for those following the Basic model delivery (for those working 16+ hours and 30+ hours per week), but the study was unable to identify why this model was more effective than the Call Centre and Private/ Voluntary models.  Personal Adviser meetings were heavily focused on sorting out benefits with little time for work related activities.  Clients and staff felt that the one-stop-shop approach and personalised approach was an improvement on previous arrangements.  Many Advisors felt ill-equipped to deal with clients with more complex health or personal problems and had a limited knowledge of services to which they could refer these clients.  Advisors were more likely to view sick and disabled clients as not work ready and less likely to pursue work-related activities with these groups.  The introduction of the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinders in March 2002 may have contributed to poorer employment outcomes as evidence from staff suggests this created insecurity and uncertainty among staff who began leaving the ONE pilots. It was difficult to replace experienced staff as the pilots had less than 12 months left to run  There is no useful evidence about the differences in provision between the three models of delivery. |
| New Deal for Disabled People (12 studies) | New Deal, which was piloted from 1999 and extended nationally in 2001, supported claimants of incapacity benefit to undertake work-focused interviews to order to access an individualised package of job search activities, as well as training and other employment advice). This was delivered by private, voluntary or public sector Job Brokers. | Significant (p < 0.05) increases in employment rates after 24 months for both existing (+11%) and new (+7%) claimants were reported. It also found significant (p < 0.001) reductions in benefit recipiency for existing (-16%) and new (-13%) New Deal registered IB claimants. Stronger and significant effects were reported for those claiming IB for at least 3 years, those furthest from the labour market, and those in areas with higher rates of IB claims. No substantial differences in employment impact by Job Broker type for either new or existing claimants were reported. However this study did not adequately adjust for potential selection bias due to the voluntary nature of the New Deal, with more motivated, job-ready claimants more likely to volunteer.  After 12 months, 47% of New Deal registrants were in paid work.  Women, those over 50, those with difficulties with basic skills and those whose health condition did not limit their daily activities had a significantly higher likelihood of employment after 12 months. Ethnic minorities, those without musculoskeletal or mental health conditions were less likely to be in work.  Those living in London, the North West and the West Midlands were also less likely to be in employment.  Of those who did enter employment, 72% suggested that they would have obtained work without the help of a Job Broker, again suggesting that New Deal participants were already motivated to return to work.  There was low awareness of the scheme amongst the eligible population and employers with around only 10% of eligible claimants getting in contact with Job Brokers. Mant claimants also felt that they did not or could not fulfil the criteria so self-selected out of the scheme. Similarly it was reported some Job Brokers would not register claimants who they felt had higher needs than they could provide. This was partly caused by the job conversion targets that Job Brokers had to adhere to. |
| Pathways to Work (10 studies) | 7 pilot areas. New and repeat incapacity benefit claimants had to undertake a work-focused interview 8 weeks into their claim. Non-attendance could result in benefit deductions. Rollout was completed in 2008  Personal Advisors provided individualised advice and support to facilitate claimants’ return to work, including the Choices package (easier access to existing programmes such as the New Deal, along with new initiatives such as the Return to Work Credit, and the Condition Management Programme). | In one study, after 10 1/2 months, the intervention group showed increases in both the probability of being employed (+ 9.4% p < 0.001) and increased monthly earnings (+£71.73, p < 0.001) and reductions in the probability of claiming incapacity benefits (- 8.2%, p < 0.001) and reporting a work-limiting health condition (-2.9%, p < 0.05). No differences were found by age or sex.  A follow-up controlled cohort study (n = 5784) identified an increased likelihood of being employed after 18 months (+7.4%, p = 0.09) for the intervention group. This was stronger for women (13%, p < 0.05) and those with dependent children (17.6%, p < 0.05). No statistically significant differences were found for monthly earnings, the probability of claiming incapacity-related benefits or reporting limiting health conditions.  Only if claimants were close to the labour market did they view the work-focused interviews positively.  Pathways failed to overcome the main barriers to employment – weak local labour markers, attitudes of employers and those with more serious health conditions feeling that they had little to gain from the intervention.  Some Advisors, in order to meet targets and be cost effective, reported prioritising clients who were more likely to return to work quickly. The short-term nature of Pathways components also limited their ability to provide the ongoing support needed for those furthest from the labour market, particularly those with more complex (often mental) health conditions. Tensions also arose between the Advisers’ roles as ‘enablers’ (providing individualised and supportive interventions) and ‘enforcers’ (imposing benefit sanctions). |

**Table 3 Summary of ‘interventions offering financial incentives for disabled people’**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Intervention** | **Description** | **Findings** |
| Return to Work Credit and Disabled Person’s Tax Credit (6 studies) | Return to Work Credit was introduced as part of Pathways with a payment of £40 per week for up to 52 weeks to new IB claimants returning to work for 15+ hours per week and earning less than £15,000 p.a. | Return to Work Credit was seen as positive in that it helped with the transition from benefits to work helping wioth budgeting, clearing debts and boosting confidence. However for some participants this extra income activated debt recovery and some professionals noted that it only worked for those already close to the labour market. Other professional were concerned that it was only available for low paid work.  Uptake was highest for women returning to low-skilled, part-time employment.  Ultimately, although Credit may have provided an incentive or support for claimants already thinking about returning to work, there was no clear evidence that their return to work depended on it. |
| Permitted Work (2 studies) | Introduced in 2002 to replace Therapeutic Work, the Permitted Work rules allow incapacity benefit claimants to work up to 16 hours per week and earn up to £88.50 per week for up to 52 weeks (or earn £20 per week indefinitely) without losing benefits. | Those with a shorter benefits history or with a working partner were more likely to start work under Permitted Work than under the previous Therapeutic Work scheme.  However for single people it led to a benefit trap as the threshold earnings cut off for Working Tax Credit was higher for couples, which made working over 16 hours more viable for them |

**Table 4 Summary of ‘management of health conditions to improve fitness to work’**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Intervention** | **Description** | **Findings** |
| Condition Management Programme (7 studies) | Introduced as part of Pathways. Designed to address the three main conditions reported by those claiming incapacity benefit – mental health issues, cardio-vascular and musculoskeletal problems.  Commissioned and delivered by Jobcentre Plus and Primary Care Trusts. Attempts to help with issues such as lack of confidence, anxiety and pain management. | The intervention did assist claimants into moving towards, if not actually into, employment.  Personal Advisers viewed this intervention as the most appropriate referral option for those furthest from the labour market, as it offered them the first steps in managing their conditions on a day-to-day basis.  Often advisers had insufficient knowledge of health conditions, particularly mental health conditions, as well as the scheme in general, which led to inappropriate referrals and unsuccessful outcomes. |

Overall the authors concluded:

* The use of personal advisors and individual case management did help some participants back to work.
* Time pressures and job outcome targets influenced advisors to select ‘easier-to-place’ claimants into programmes and also inhibited the development of mutual trust, which was needed for individual case management to work effectively.
* Financial incentives can help with lasting transitions into work, but the incentives were often set too low or were too short-term to have an effect.
* Many of the studies suffered from selection bias into these programmes of more work-ready claimants. Even though these were national programmes, they had very low awareness and take-up rates, making it unlikely that a population-level impact would be achieved even if effective for participants.

***Goss et al (2000)*** conducted a postal survey with 180 employers to investigate employer attitudes to the employment of disabled employees. This paper specifically focuses on data in relation to the presence or absence of a specialist HR manager. Writing at a time just after the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), they concluded:

* Disabled employees and job seekers in the UK are likely to have a better chance of keeping or securing employment with larger employers with a specialist HR, however this is not a guarantee of encountering good practice.
* Among the organisations without specialist HR support, i.e. smaller companies, the awareness of good practice is least developed.
* Once an organisation had around 65 employees they were likely to employ a specialised HR manager.
* Those organisations with a specialist HR manager were more likely to take positive responses to disability measures. Two areas were seen as significant, membership of the ‘Two-Ticks’ scheme and the use of external advisors.
* A specialist HR manager was also positively associated with having good knowledge of the 1944 Disabled Person’s Act and employing registered and non-registered disabled employees.
* The DDA is weak as a form of external influence, and alongside an absence of internal impetus for change from dedicated HR personnel, it is likely it will do little to change the marginality of disability issues within smaller organisations (which as the authors noted constituted the majority of UK employers).

***Lewis et al (2013)*** reported on the experiences of 98 participants in the UK supported work programme, WORKSTEP. WORKSTEP was introduced in 2001 and sought to provide personalised, tailored support to help people with disabilities find employment either in the ‘open’ labour market or through placements specifically created for disabled people. Participants were interviewed about their experiences. The programme was funded by the DWP and managed by its agency, Jobcentre Plus. WORKSTEP ceased to exist in October 2010. The purpose of the paper was not to provide an evaluation of a particular programme, but to explore, from the perspective of participants, experiences of supported employment and employment itself. The authors noted:

* WORKSTEP was seen as a radical shift in focus, moving away from ‘compensating’ employers for the lower productivity levels of supported employees towards output-related funding arrangements for providers. It was a movement away from ‘sheltered’ to mainstream employment and with a focus on a full market wage.
* Participants in WORKSTEP had to be 'job ready' and able/ willing to work 16 hours a week, however it was targeted at those with complex needs, which those with vision impairment alone were unlikely to have. This gives rise to tensions within the scheme as those with complex needs are less likely to fulfil this ‘job ready’ criteria.
* The skills, expertise, and 'fit' of the support worker were key to employment success.
* Participants valued the personalised nature of employment support - flexibility, responsiveness
* Participants also appreciated the ‘safety net’ approach in that reassurance and support were 'just a phone call away'.
* It is important to recognise the quality of employment experiences, and what work might add in terms of personal development, not work at any cost.

***Waddington (2004)*** explored the strategies and interventions that currently support or would successfully support archivists (and allied professionals) with disabilities to enter and remain within the profession. The findings showed:

* Fears/ concerns from employees in relation to asking for adjustments and employers providing them, were mostly unfounded.
* Adjustments can be creative as needed. Not all employees will need adjustments, some may require a lot more. Most situations can be overcome with a little lateral thinking. These adjustments must also exist for social events and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
* The interview is the preferred time, for both applicants and employees, to discuss access requirements, in other words, not at the application stage.
* There are different challenges, and different ways of supporting those who become disabled, as opposed to those with life-long conditions.
* Serious consideration needs to be given to developing/ promoting part-time roles within the archivist profession.

***Wistow and Schneider (2007)*** conducted telephone interviews with 31 managers of employment support agencies to understand more about the types of services offered, training provided and operational data in terms of staffing and caseloads. Particular attention was paid to the requirements that managers deem necessary to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. They concluded:

* There is a need for reliable, accessible benefits advice in the context of a responsive welfare system based on individual circumstances. Service users and employment officers need to be confident that, if a job does not work out, a return to benefits will be smooth and secure.
* Disability services across health, social care, education and transition services all need greater awareness of the scope and aims of supported employment.
* Employers should be helped to recognise the benefits e.g. greater staff cohesion, increased productivity of employing people with disabilities.
* Supported employment providers require a more stable and reliable funding system.
* Effective leadership and parity of resources is needed in order to provide consistent and effective employment services across disability groups and across geographical areas.

## Question 4: How are individuals with vision impairment included in the labour market? What evidence do we have of the barriers and enablers to inclusion, both within society and within the workplace?

Due to the large number of papers identified under category 4 and its secondary focus to this study, the decision was made to perform a narrative review of these papers. This involved selecting the most relevant papers to this research (n=13), and then reviewing them to draw out the key themes.

The majority of papers identified focused primarily on the barriers faced by individuals with vision impairment in accessing the labour market. We therefore commence with a presentation of the key barriers identified, before focusing on the different examples of enablers which can help to improve labour market outcomes.

### Barriers

O’ Day (1999) provides helpful structure in interpreting the barriers faced by individuals with vision impairment in relation to employment, by identifying three different categories:

1. Barriers within the person
2. Societal barriers
3. Programmatic barriers.

These categories are adopted for presenting the outcomes of the narrative review.

#### Barriers within the person

Within person barriers refer to barriers specific to the individual, such as their disability, qualifications, experiences and motivations. Various different examples were identified, which are discussed in turn.

* **Consequences of vision impairment/sight loss** - several studies identified barriers which can be linked directly to the individual’s vision impairment/sight loss. These include still coming to terms with vision impairment (Crudden et al, 2005), difficulties with social interaction (O’Day, 1999), and ‘factors arising from vision impairment’ (La Grow and Daye, 2005, p175)
* **Additional disabilities** - similarly, having disabilities in addition to vision impairment was also identified as a barrier by multiple studies (Coffey et al, 2014; Crudden et al, 2005)
* **Independent travel and mobility skills** - confidence in travelling independently (limited transportation options is also a societal barrier). A study by Cmar et al (2018) identified a link between employment outcomes and ‘transportation self-efficacy’, which was defined as ‘having confidence in the ability to plan and use transportation’. Limited mobility skills was also identified as a barrier by Coffey et al (2014)
* **Limited prior work experience** - limited prior work experience was identified as a barrier by Coffey et al, 2014 and O’Day (1999).
* **Lack of knowledge of rights**, e.g. around Equality legislation (Dong et al, 2017)
* **Lack of confidence**, e.g. in requesting accommodations and identifying problems. (Coffey, 2014; Dong et al, 2017)
* **Having dependents** (Coffey, 2014)
* **Lower qualifications** (Crudden et al, 2018)

***Societal barriers***

Societal barriers refer to the social barriers which individuals with vision impairment face within the labour market. The majority of literature identified focused on these types of barriers.

* **Disability stigmatisation** – a particularly strong theme identified within the literature was that of stigmatization and negative attitudes towards individuals with vision impairment. For example, Benoit et al 2013) identified misconceptions about what persons with disabilities are able to do in the workplace. Similarly, Capella McDonnall et al (2014) through a quantitative survey were able to identify a statistically significant correlation between the attitudes of employers towards persons with vision impairment and their likelihood to employ them. Similar findings were presented by Coffey et al, 2014; Crudden and McBroom, 1999; Crudden et al, 2005; Dong et al, 2017; La Grow and Daye, 2005; Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (2020).
* **Limited understanding of vision impairment** – very closely aligned to disability stigmatization were barriers faced due to a limited understanding of employers of vision impairment. As well as affecting their likelihood to employ a person with a vision impairment, this also impacted upon the accommodations which were put in place. (Capella McDonnall et al, 2014; Coffey et al, 2014; O’Day, 1999; Dong et al; 2017).
* **Lack of accommodations** – barriers faced due to either a lack of ability, a lack of willingness to make accommodations for employees with vision impairment or difficult processes for asking for accommodations. (Coffey et al, 2014; Crudden and McBroom, 1999; Dong et al, 2017; O’ Day 1999)

#### Programmatic barriers

Programmatic barriers refer to the unintended barriers which emerge through the systems which are in place to support people with disabilities. This includes social security and employment services.

* **Lack of aspiration from employment service providers** for clients with vision impairment finding work (O’Day, 1999; Benoit et al, 2013)
* **‘Benefits trap’** meaning that unemployed people with vision impairment are reluctant to find work and give up the security of benefits (O’Day, 1999)

### Enablers

Several of the studies identified enablers which can help individuals with vision impairment in either securing employment or when in employment. In most cases these responded directly to the barriers identified above.

* **Working with employers** – several articles identified working with employers as an important enabler for overcoming negative attitudes and improving awareness of employers who might otherwise be resistant to employ individuals with vision impairment. (Crudden et al, 2015; La Grow and Daye, 2005; Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos, 2020). Examples for facilitating this include group sessions for employers around disability awareness month (Crudden et al, 2015) and opportunities for employers to engage with people with disabilities (Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos, 2020).
* **Having access to vocational services** (La Grow and Daye, 2005). Crudden et al, 2018 explored secondary data of clients who accessed vocational services because they were at risk of losing their jobs. The study found evidence that in these cases, short-term on the job rehabilitation support is most effective, and that prompt action is extremely important for positive outcomes. Dong et al (2017) identified the importance of services helping job-seekers to develop strategies for requesting accommodations, including self-advocacy and self-determination skills, as well as ensuring that their clients have an understanding of the nature of the accommodations which they require.
* **Networks** – social networks were identified as an enabler for identifying work opportunities (Crudden and McBroom, 1999) and an association was identified between positive employments for graduates and social networks (Roy et al, 1998).
* **Adaptations provided by employers** – whilst lack of accommodations was identified as a barrier, several studies provided evidence that with the right adaptations, individuals with vision impairment can be successful in employment (Crudden and McBroom, 1999). This includes having specialist support to set up on assistive technology on company computer systems (Crudden et al, 2005) and having access to equipment (La Grow and Daye, 2005).
* **Personal motivation** – Crudden and McBroom (1999) and Crudden et al (2005) identified the motivation of the job seeker to keep persisting until they secured employment as an important enabler. Crudden et al (2005) suggest that job clubs can be helpful to ensure that job seekers receive peer support.
* **Opportunities** – La Grow and Daye (2005) surveyed 95 individuals with vision impairment and asked them to identify ways in which barriers to employment might be overcome. One theme which emerged from this survey was the importance of individuals with vision impairment being given opportunity to prove their ability to employers.
* **Improved transportation** (La Grow and Daye, 2005).

# Focus groups: methodology

In this section we present the approach we followed to conduct the focus group sessions. This includes an overview of the approach followed for recruitment, a summary of the demographics of the 23 participants who took part and an overview of the process followed and the questions explored during the focus group discussions.

## Recruitment

Participants for the focus groups were recruited through organisations who provide services to people with vision impairment in the Greater London area. Interested individuals were asked to complete a consent form and short demographic survey on [Qualtrics](http://www.qualtrics.com). Consent was received by thirty two participants who were then contacted by the project team to arrange a date for the focus group. Several recruited participants unavailable during the focus group sessions were instead invited to respond to the same questions via email. However, only one person responded to this invitation. It is worthwhile noting that the data collection took place during a period of lockdown for the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that many people were having to work remotely and home school their children. This goes some way to explaining why such a relatively large proportion who consented to take part in the project later decided not to participate.

Originally it was intended to hold separate groups for individuals with vision impairment and for professionals who provide employed-related support to help persons with vision impairment into employment. However, our demographic survey highlighted that the majority of professionals who consented to take part also had a vision impairment, and therefore we decided to merge these groups together to allow the professionals opportunity to talk from both the perspective of a person with a vision impairment navigating the labour market and from the perspective of a professional providing employment services.

Our demographic survey also highlighted that we had underrepresentation from participants aged 25 and under, and therefore to address this we also decided to recruit younger individuals who live outside of the Greater London area.

## Participant demographics

Twenty two participants took part in the focus group interviews, with a further participant emailing her responses. The table below provides an overview of some of their key characteristics.

**Table 5: Participant demographics (n=23)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** |
| Professional  Employed  Looking for work  Long term sick  Taking a break from work | 10  8  2  1  1 |
| Vision impairment | Yes = 21  No = 2  Professionals with VI= 8 |
| Gender | Female = 12  Male = 11 |
| Age | 18 – 25 = 3  26 years old or over = 20 |
| **White**   * English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British * Irish * Gypsy or Irish Traveller * Any other White background   **Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups**   * White and Black Caribbean * White and Black African * White and Asian * Any other Mixed or Multiple ethnic background   **Asian or Asian British**   * Indian * Pakistani * Bangladeshi * Chinese * Any other Asian background   **Black, African, Caribbean or Black British**   * African * Caribbean * Any other Black, African or Caribbean background   **Other ethnic group**   * Arab * Any other ethnic group   **Prefer not to say** | 9  0  0  3  1  0  0  1  2  5  1  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  1 |

Those who were employed were in a variety of professions including social work, Civil Service, and for various sight loss charities. The conditions which caused participants’ vision impaired were varied, and included glaucoma, cataracts, rod cone dystrophy, Usher syndrome and brain injury.

## Overview of focus groups

A total of five focus groups were held on Zoom, taking place in both the day time and evening, to allow maximum participation. A maximum of six participants attended each group to ensure that there was opportunity for everyone to contribute and share their experiences. The focus groups explored a range of themes, which included:

* What might positive employed-related outcomes look like?
* Barriers and enablers which impact upon individuals with vision impairment securing employment and participating within the workplace
* Experiences of the Access to Work scheme
* Experiences of Jobcentre Plus
* Interventions which have been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market
* Gaps in employment related services for individuals with vision impairment in the Greater London area

The focus group meetings were recorded using the recording function within Zoom and later transcribed verbatim, with minor edits for clarity and to remove identifying features. The data, from the five focus groups and one emailed response, was then analysed following a thematic analysis approach which sought to identify common themes within the data. Computer software to support the data analysis, namely NVivo, was used. All names used are pseudonyms.

**Study limitations**

This study provides an in-depth snapshot of the experiences of those with vision impairment searching for and accessing employment, as well as those supporting individuals with a vision impairment from a professional viewpoint. Whilst this research study was never intended to replicate exactly the demographic makeup of the population, neither in general nor in relation to those individuals with vision impairment exclusively, we do recognise that there are some limitations in respect to the types of employment activities or otherwise that the participants were involved in, the ages of the participants, and the ethnic background of participants.

16 (76%) of our 21 participants with a vision impairment were employed, with two looking for work, one long term sick and one taking a break from work. On the one hand this was great as it helped provide a detailed snapshot of the experiences of individuals with vision impairment in employment. However evidence has consistently shown that the proportion of people with a vision impairment in paid employment is low, such as estimates from RNIB that only 23% of blind and partially sighted working age individuals are in employment (Slade and Edwards, 2015). Consequently, this report is more heavily focused on the experiences of those who are in employment, or have been employed relatively recently. We actively tried to recruit those who were not in employment, and these groups are harder to reach, however things were made more difficult by the fact that we had to rely on online methods of recruitment due to the Covid-19 pandemic. If face-to-face meetings had been possible we would have asked that contacts from the Vision Foundation and other associated organisations provide a direct invitation to potential participants. A future piece of work may wish to seek to focus directly on the experiences of individuals with vision impairment not in employment. Furthermore, the fields that the participants with vision impairment were involved in were slightly skewed due to the fact that we were actively recruiting those professionals supporting individuals with vision impairment and employment. Eight (47%) of the 17 participants with vision impairment, who were employed, worked in the sight loss sector. There were also two social workers and two people working for the Civil Service. Consequently there was a bias away from those working in manual and service industry jobs. This could be because those individuals working in such roles may have a less severe vision impairment and do not see themselves as ‘having a vision impairment’ and have self-selected away from organisations which provide support and consequently have missed our recruitment notices. In future work it may be useful contacting large organisations such as supermarkets, Royal Mail, Amazon, big clothing brands, furniture superstores to see if they have a disability network through which studies may be advertised.

The majority of participants with vision impairment were aged 26 or over, so we extended our recruitment to include two individuals living outside of the Greater London area but were aged 18 – 25 years old, however still 85% (18) of the participants with vision impairment were in this older age category. Based on the limited data there did not appear to be many differences between the age categories except that the younger participants had less experience to share. Furthermore it’s worth remembering that we were not recruiting those in full-time education or training and younger people tend to fall into this category, so consequently our pool from which to draw participants was smaller than that of the older adults.

The ethnic background of the participants was similar to that of the population of Greater London in terms of participants who described themselves as White British, White Irish, White Gypsy/ Traveller or White other, with 52% compared with 59% (2011 Census). However in this study 8 (35%) participants described themselves as Asian or British Asian, whereas there were 0 (0%) of participants that described themselves as Black, African, Caribbean or Black British or belonging to another ethnic group. This does not fit with the population of either Greater London, or what we know of people with vision impairments. The research team did actively try to recruit those from diverse backgrounds, setting out a specific call to those with a BAME background. Future research could work with local communities e.g. social clubs, sports teams, religious organisations to endeavour to obtain the perspectives from these groups to investigate further the intersectionality between the persons disability and their race Involvement in the project was also skewed towards those who had the digital skills, equipment and/ or confidence to take part in an online focus group. To mitigate this we offered to support participants to access the online survey, which one participant asked us to do, and we also offered to support individuals with installing and setting up Zoom, however all participants were competent in doing this. However there may have been some interested parties who were not able to access the online survey and consent form. In future work, when constraints on face-to-face contact as the result of Covid-19 are lessened, it would be useful if contacts, when advertising the study offered to pass on contact details e.g. postal addresses or telephone numbers to the research team.

# Focus groups: findings

In this section we provide an overview of the key themes which emerged through the five focus group sessions. Guest et al (2017) suggest that between 3-6 focus groups will elicit approximately 90% of the discoverable themes. As noted in the overview of the focus groups, all names used are pseudonyms.

## Positive employment-related outcomes

As an introduction to the discussion and in order to recognise the diversity of experience, participants were asked to comment on what positive employment-related outcomes might look like for them, as individuals with vision impairment. Participants highlighted a number of factors which help promote positive employment-related outcomes which will be reviewed below. Participants were also quick to recognise the labour market challenges faced by the country as a whole, not just for those with vision impairment, with Simon and Michael commenting:

I think the market is volatile at the best of times, at the moment particularly, some companies are just furloughing staff, not employing staff… …trying to manage expectations of people. What is realistic and honestly in an ideal world we would like everyone to get a job. (Simon)

As long as we don’t lose sight of the fact that the world is a tough place, and it’s never going to be perfect. The world of work is difficult for everybody. It is tough and competitive and at times a bit unfair. (Michael)

### Theme: VI aware employers and colleagues

The most common positive employment-related outcome mentioned by participants, across all five focus groups was for employers and colleagues to be aware of vision impairment:

The other positive outcome for me is the colleagues are just aware, and they just get it so that it makes it easier for that employee, to be more integrated within the team. (Greg)

I know people say this all the time, but it's just awareness, disability awareness and vision impairment awareness around the place of employment. (Duncan)

What I would prefer from my colleagues, [is] if they just came over and just chat, talk to me understood what my visual impairment is, how they can help. It just makes working much more easier for you and for them, because then you can do your job, the way you need to do a job and they can do their job. (Pritika)

As will be discussed in later sections this awareness might take various forms for example, awareness around the capabilities of people with vision impairment:

Sometimes you have to break down people's perception of a blind person. And what they're capable of, what they're not capable of, and yet people that have never met a blind person. They may never have met a blind person in their life so they their expectation of what you are going to be like is from what they've read or seen or heard. I think people were quite surprised usually that I'm just another person. I'm just Bella and it takes a little while for them to see past my visual impairment, sometimes and just be like oh it’s Bella. (Bella)

…like average people if they genuinely think that people who are blind can't feed themselves, like no wonder they're not hiring us for jobs, because they don't think we can even do the basic things, nevermind be employed and working in society. (Yasir)

Awareness in relation to technology:

…in terms of adjustments it would be ensuring that I had an employer that was very proactive in providing me with the right assistive technology. So for me that's JAWS, and in a timely fashion, with a computer that's actually powerful enough to use the software, to actually work quickly enough. (John)

For me, a positive outcome, I think, would be around an organisation being able to make things like their systems or processes accessible with screen reading software. (Hazem)

Finally awareness about Access to Work, including how to apply for it and the types of things it covers:

And if I needed a support worker, I want the employer to be proactive in ensuring that that happened. (John)

I mean on the positive side, one thing I would say, when companies do get it right and offer you Access to Work and the proper support, and then it does work and it and it's generally really good. (Simon)

### Theme: Valued and equal employee

Participants spoke of wanting to be seen as a valued employee, on an equal footing with their sighted colleagues:

From my point of view, being viewed as a candidate not a VI candidate. Being looked at for your skills and your qualifications. (Emily)

So that would be a key factor for me just to have an equal chance really to partake in in everything that happens in the workplace. (Duncan)

Stop worrying about my visual impairment, I will take care of that. (Sana)

I think it's very important that… …you have equality with your colleagues, and with other people that are doing the same job. (Michael)

Martin shared an account of where he had to do a house search as part of his law enforcement role. He spoke with the detective in charge, told him about his visual impairment and demonstrated his skills. Having seen Martin in action the detective was happy for Martin to continue commenting “you’ve done the same training that I have… …I’ve got total confidence in you” allowing Martin to “get on with it.” Martin followed this up by saying:

There have been lots of other incidents where that kind of level of confidence has not been expressed, even though I've done the same qualifications and the same kind of experience, as my colleagues. (Martin)

Linked to the awareness of vision impairment John also emphasised the importance of valuing his skills as an individual, as an employee:

I don't necessarily expect my colleagues to necessarily know everything there is to know about sight loss. I think that's an unrealistic expectation, but I would expect my colleagues to be prepared to have a go and go at it with a can do attitude and judge me, based on what I can do, rather than what I can't do so that, for me, would be more or less the ideal employment scenario. (John)

Simon was also keen to highlight that his vision (and hearing impairment) was just one aspect of his being, and that it did not define him as an employee:

I always think what defines me personally, is not disabled it's that I’m a fat middle aged Jew from London. That's what defines me. My sight loss and hearing loss is just a by-product of other things. (Simon)

### Theme: Job satisfaction and the opportunity to progress

For Asif, the positive outcome was securing employment after a long period of unemployment:

I kept getting rejected or not getting called for interview, so when I applied for the agency that I am currently at, it was really like a shock for me, because when I was told yes you've been offered the job I couldn’t really believe it. I really couldn’t believe it because I was so used to sorry, you wasn't successful, or you didn't have enough experience or anything like that. (Asif)

Asif appeared to be happy and fulfilled in his role however other participants acknowledged that securing employment in and of itself is the bare minimum and that ideally participants should be working in a field that they want to be and with the opportunity to progress and develop their skills where appropriate. Michael commented:

I suppose one positive outcome is that you find work which has come about as a result of a choice as opposed to ending up somewhere because there’s nothing else. The kind of job that you want, the job that enriches your life. In a place whose strengths enables you to flourish, as opposed to just any job which could make you quite miserable. (Michael)

Tom and Greg also observed:

For some blind people, possibly other disabilities as well, almost a sticky floor syndrome, where you get the right job, you get the right job set up, the right team, you are quite comfortable. Is there an inclination to stay there longer than you should do, because you don't want to have to go through the whole process of having to explain that again trying to get the same accommodations, get everyone to understand what sorts of workplace adjustments, you might need? (Tom)

…it's about giving people autonomy and choice as well, and not feeling like they have to stick in a job because that employers supporting them, and they sort of feel fearful of getting another job, because actually they're scared. (Greg)

### Theme: Importance of flexibility

Flexibility in terms of the working day was important to a number of participants, as Ruth and Helen commented,

What would be important for me is to have flexible working hours and patterns, so that if you are struggling with poor light levels or icy pavements that if you're going into employment, your office or whatever, you could go a time that suits you. (Ruth)

It is important to me to work somewhere which offers flexible / agile working options. (Helen)

Balancing the challenges of childcare as well as employment was mentioned by a small number of participants (Bella, Joanne, and Sana), echoing the challenges that are often also shared with sighted employees. Joanne commented:

Flexibility of working because I've got a young child. When he goes to high school it's going to be easier, but, there's a lot that comes with that responsibility, and I would certainly need a part time role, I think, and something very flexible and, of course those things are quite hard to find. (Joanne)

Nevertheless for some participants a full-time job was a key positive outcome for them:

I personally want to work full-time hours. (Helen)

To me it would always be full time full-time employment, and that will be really important to me. (John)

Michael and Greg also discussed the need for employers to be flexible in relation to sickness and time off for eye appointments that might occur, and for it not to result in disciplinary action which Michael found surprising:

If you take too much time off, even though it's through no fault of your own, from illness or disability, there is a roadmap, there was a process which ends in being sacked. That was a real shock to me because that's really tough. (Michael)

### Theme: The whole package

Ultimately however, some participants listed a number of overlapping factors that came together to make positive employment outcomes:

It is important for me that I can fully contribute in work, have positive relationships with colleagues and get good opportunities to progress. (Helen)

…the whole process, you really need all of it to work, whether that's the right equipment, right team, right set up to enable you to do your job… (Tom)

Annika for example stated “I think it is actually the entire process” and then went on to discuss employer disability awareness, being valued in the workplace and the importance of “actually get[ting] a job offer” in the first place.

## Barriers, enablers and strategies to employment

Participants were asked for their thoughts and opinions on the major barriers and enablers for individuals with vision impairment, to both securing employment, and also once in the workplace. They were then asked to share the interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation that they thought had been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market.

Some of the barriers, enablers and strategies were directed more to the individual and others to the employer; however as will be shown in the discussion, there was often overlap between these categories. These barriers, enablers and strategies were then grouped around themes. The themes identified were:

* positive self-esteem and self-advocacy
* mobility and orientation skills
* technology
* accessibility and disclosure
* experience and opportunities
* employer perceptions and VI awareness
* personalised support

Specialist support, information and guidance, including knowing how and where to access it, was identified as the cornerstone of positive employment experiences, and was a theme that ran through all of the focus group discussions. Consequently issues in relation to specialist support, information and guidance (or the lack of) will be woven throughout this section.

Experiences in relation to Jobcentre Plus and Access to Work provided clear examples of where systems set up to support and enable those with a vision impairment (and/ or other disabilities) could be viewed as O’Day’s (1999) ‘programmatic barriers’ and created unintended barriers to employment. Comments relating to Jobcentre Plus and Access to Work were numerous so will be addressed separately.

### Theme: Positive self-esteem and self-advocacy

Participants acknowledged that a lack of positive self-esteem was a barrier to some individuals with vision impairment. This lack of self-confidence was a result of many interconnecting issues but included experiences when an individual was told that they could not do something because of their vision impairment:

Sana shared some experiences from her youth in which she had been told that as a result of her vision impairment she would not be able to do certain activities:

Nothing, so I had no information I didn't know anything, all I was told throughout my schooling life is you will never use a mobile phone, you'll never use a computer, you'll never do this, you know, all I ever got was nos. (Sana)

This led her to suggest that these negative perceptions may mean that people with vision impairments may isolate themselves as they do not realise their own capacities:

I just think there's far too many people that have locked themselves away. They're sitting at home and they don't even realize their own potential because of certain people that have put us in certain boxes. (Sana)

Similarly Ramiza commented:

…losing your sight you do lose your confidence being at home, so the help is not out there, where do you start to look? (Ramiza)

Emily shared some experiences of supporting teenagers with vision impairments:

…the decisions you make, and what career you choose, and how you and how your aspirations might be narrowed or your confidence might be knocked by what you're told you can and can't do from a young age. (Emily)

Low self-esteem was related to the grief that some individuals felt in losing their sight:

…you can't go to work right now, because you're, so in that grief process that your head’s not there to even learn how to use a piece of technology… …if you're not happy at home you're not gonna be happy at work. (Greg)

…and I don't think people understand you know sight loss is a grieving process, I did have sight. (Sana)

A lot of people struggle with losing…they're grieving the loss of their vision later in life, as well as trying to work out what support they need in the workplace, making sure that they're still effective in their job. (Emily)

As well as the challenges for sighted individuals who lose their sight, Emily also recognised that there were difficulties for those with variable or progressive eye conditions.

Developing self-advocacy skills, particularly with specialist input and support, was identified as an important strategy of rehabilitation in becoming more confident in one’s skills and capabilities, which would then translate to the workplace:

The enabler I would say is self-advocacy and we had a lot of individuals who really struggled to self-advocate. They were not at all confident having conversations with their employers about what their needs, were. And perhaps more pertinently they weren't confident in challenging their employer when something went wrong and sadly that did unfortunately result in some of them losing their jobs. (John)

…being able to be confident in advocating for yourself can really change an employer's position on whether they are going to look at you with pity, or whether they are going to look at you, as a as a strong candidate. (Emily)

Advocacy’s really, really important, but I think also think making visual impairment sexy and making it not like the plague. It's all about selling yourself as well. And also using your visual impairment to your advantage it's really important. (Greg)

Zainab also recognised that it’s not just individuals with recently acquired vision impairments, it may be those with a vision impairment whose condition deteriorates, or just anyone with a vision impairment who may require specialist advice on self-advocacy:

…someone who already has a visual impairment and employment, as well as losing sight later on, is a lot of blind and partially sighted people don't know how to advocate for themselves. And when you don't know how to advocate for yourself, you get pushed aside, so if someone says to you Oh, this is the end of your employment journey with us because of X, Y and Z. You are then going to accept that as possible, but if you if you're confident and you know how to advocate for yourself, you will challenge them. (Zainab)

The appropriate specialist support from Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs) at the time of diagnosis was identified by professionals as being particularly important as without it, often individuals were left floundering when trying to move forward in their life. Gabriella and Greg both mentioned the three years or so that it may take for an individual to get in touch before asking for support:

And when I pick them up, three years later on, and they've not accessed any service because they're not aware of anything, and maybe they don't even bother to Google anything because they are still in that stress, that emotional stage of their grief. Because they are still in grief they're not really going to google anything. A lot of these people don't get to see these people in the hospitals that are saying that they can provide services and stuff. They slip through the net. (Greg)

Sometimes I just wonder if I would meet people two or three years before I meet them. You know, and they wouldn't be sitting at home for the last three, four years, it would be much easier for me and for them… …to be fair it would be cheaper for the Government, because obviously that's why Access to Work is there because they realise keeping people in work is better for the economy then keeping them on benefits. (Gabriella)

Joanne, Bella, Sana and Pritika all mentioned that they did not receive such specialist support which they found challenging and regretful; however there was a sense of resignation in that is just the way things are. Fortunately, as was the case with almost all the participants in the focus groups, they were now moving on in their own paths in relation to employment. Bella commented:

I've never even had white cane training from my local authority. They've never contacted me. I know what's out there and if I wanted to go get it because I'm a social worker I know what's out there, but I only now know that, I didn't know like 10 years ago when I lost my sight. (Bella)

Simon and Greg also commented that this kind of support needs to be available for individuals with vision impairment who were working quite satisfactorily but then face challenges when their vision deteriorates.

Professional counselling was also suggested as a tool to support individuals, however as Michael remarked there are conflicting arguments as to whether a ‘standard’ counsellor is appropriate or one that has experience of vision impairment:

The counselling profession are often very keen to assert that it doesn't really matter whether your counsellor is impaired for example, a counsellor can counsel anyone. That's a valid position to take of course, but what won't go away, is that that some people want some of them will always prefer a counsellor [with vision impairment experience]. (Michael)

Finally, being part of networks for individuals with vision impairment was seen as a positive step in reducing isolation, promoting self-confidence, and signposting to specialist knowledge, support and guidance. As someone who had recently lost her sight Joanne commented:

…them online forums, that you can join. And they have speakers and all that stuff. I think it's quite good. I did go along to some of their group meetings and listen to people speak and then afterwards, you know, try to pluck up the courage to speak to some other people. I think those kinds of things are really important, because you don't have that much opportunity to meet blind or partially sighted people, if you're new to the whole community. (Joanne)

Emily also suggested that for individuals who had attended specialist education that they might be more aware of the specialist advice and support that is available:

Specialist VI support has never really been accessible to people in the mainstream system. So if you are lucky enough to go to a specialist VI school you're brought up in that world, and you know what's available. But otherwise… support you're not aware of [it] for starters. (Emily)

For me, it was when I went to the Royal National College of the Blind - I've always been to mainstream school and I went there. And I realised, I never met a blind person before, and I realised ‘Oh my God!’ There's so many blind people that can just do so many things and I didn't really know that things are possible. (Greg)

Conversely however, Pritika who had attended specialist education, highlighted the challenges for those in her position, in that they are not au fait with ‘mainstream life’:

A lot of people don't actually know, if you're not in the VI world or you're not part of a group of people who are visually impaired, because I was part of a specialist school and I also went to Loughborough as well, but after that I kind of ventured off on my own into mainstream life and education. And I also think that information is scattered everywhere and it's not in just one hub it's everywhere, you have to really look hard to where to find this how or where to find the information. (Pritika)

Helen also mentioned sporting activities as a way for individuals with vision impairment to socialise, with the added bonus that “VI people involved in sport seem to have better employment outcomes.”

Participants also highlighted that because the majority of jobs are not explicitly advertised, and rely on word of mouth, developing networks in relation to employment is particularly important:

And I also think a person own personal network is absolutely crucial. Around 60% of jobs that need to be filled, are still not advertised. A friend of a friend, you know at something, so building a network and having your mentor is absolutely crucial. (Gabriella)

Networking hubs can be valuable I personally use Purple Space, but VI professionals careers advice, technology and discussion board may be really helpful at both expanding opportunities for VI people and developing an understanding of the barriers (Helen)

And then the one thing which I found in my research is that most people with visual impairment actually found their jobs through friends and family. Which is a real problem, because that is very much a problem when you are from families which are not well connected, and that means it is heavily and disadvantaged against persons with visual impairment coming from minority groups, because they often do not come from families where they is many people that can get them into new jobs. (Annika)

Annika’s comment encouraged Sana to share:

I am from an ethnic minority background and my family can't really help me looking for jobs and things like that. They are struggling themselves. (Sana)

This reminds us that many individuals with vision impairment may also be facing discrimination and challenges due to other characteristics, not only vision impairment. In this study with 11 (48%) non-white participants, Sana was the only participant to explicitly mention race.

### Theme: Mobility and orientation skills

Having poor mobility and orientation skills were identified by some of the professionals working with individuals with vision impairment as a barrier to successful employment. As John explained, discussing mobility skills with his clients was a crucial element of the support he provided:

…we had lots of vision impaired people and you say to them ‘how are you going to get to your interview?’ ‘if you get a job interview, how you gonna go?’ and their answer would be ‘well I can't because I don’t know how to get there.’ And so, of course, if you can't get to the interview, how are you going to get the job that would be my question, and I think the final barrier. (John)

Greg also identified that people may have the appropriate technology for work, yet cannot get to their workplace due to their absent mobility skills. He suggested that this was because individuals are not provided with the appropriate rehabilitation training, and that there is a lack of specialist support as those providing assessments do not know how to link into rehabilitation services:

Individuals don't get referred to rehab for mobility training so they're rocking up to work. Yes, they've got this technology from access to work, they don't <know> how to get to work, they can't navigate around the office, because no one's even give them a cane. Because the people who had done their assessment don't know about where they get these canes from, these rehabilitation workers, and all this stuff. And it's a big part of the journey that's always missed. (Greg)

John did make the important point that it was likely that the members of these focus groups were likely to be confident with their mobility skills. This appeared to be the case, however participants did suggest that being given the time and space to familiarise themselves with their environment was crucial to them in performing to their best ability and being confident in their own abilities:

Once you're in the workplace feeling confident getting around. Even if it's knowing where the toilet is or something. There's really small things, knowing where you can go to have your lunch. Being socially confident in your environment. (Emily)

When you initially first start at workplaces, orientating yourself around your surroundings, knowing exactly where the staff room is, and all of that kind of stuff and just feeling confident with the people around you as well. During the first few weeks of your employment, if you don't make those working relationships, it can probably feel quite isolating, so I think it's really important that you get that support to be able to orientate yourself around your office environment and also make those contacts with your colleagues. (Hazem)

Zainab mentioned being able to access a training room before the training started so that she was able to familiarise herself with the equipment and layout, commenting it made her feel “comfortable” and describing it as a “really good adaptation.”

### Theme: Technology

Technology was frequently mentioned as both a barrier and enabler to successful employment for individuals with vision impairment. The focus group discussions highlighted that it was not just having access to technology that was important but knowledge about the type of technology on offer and how to access funding for it, as well as being in receipt of the correct training on the appropriate technology.

This lack of knowledge on the equipment available or how it could be made accessible was particularly strong for those who had developed sight loss later in life:

So I'm a person that did have sight, then I lost sight, so you know this equipment and everything, so I can remember the barriers. Nobody ever told me about accessibility, so I couldn't go on a computer, because when you go onto a computer you do need specialised software. I didn't even know a vision impaired person could operate a computer. (Sana)

If you have just lost your sight, you can't use JAWS, don't know how to use an iPhone. How are you gonna know this? (Bella)

John commented:

The first is accessing computer systems and, in my role at [local sightloss charity] I have lost count of the number of people with living with sight loss who simply were either not able to use a computer at all or if they were using a computer they weren't using it with assistive technology, because they didn't know it existed and it meant that they were working really, really slowly and actually suffering in some cases from eyestrain and so and we have spent a lot of time actually equipping individuals with those basic skills to be able to be successful in the workplace, such as using a computer with JAWS or with ZoomText. (John)

Fortunately for Joanne, through voluntary work she was able to practice her skills, however because it was a voluntary role she had to use her own personal equipment which she would have preferred not to do:

I've already had a little bit of experience in a couple of voluntary roles, since I lost my sight. Through those I've been learning the JAWS software and other assistive technologies that I need. …I think as a charity they do need support, because they don't have any assistive technology on their systems. And they at this point don't seem to have the money to do that, so the work I'm doing for them I’m doing on my own laptop with my own JAWS software, which isn't ideal, so I think there's certainly a lot to look at for them. (Joanne)

Other participants highlighted the challenges of ensuring that your own technology ‘fits’ with the in-house systems as Michael and Greg discussed in their focus group:

And the other barrier like Michael said is about access to technology, you know compatibility issues, does it work with my software? (Greg)

Yasir commented that he had found that company IT departments were wary of Open Source solutions suggesting that, “some of the most strongest pushback I've had is actually from the IT department in any big company.” Additionally Martin recognised that some companies may be cautious of confidentiality breaches but advised that there are IT trainers that have top-level clearance from the Government. Emily also commented that often in larger companies their tech support is overseas meaning “the whole process becomes longer.”

Similarly Helen noted, “[the] lack of compatibility of software with corporate systems is a major barrier.” However she went on to make the important point that accessibility needs to be as standard, “Scripting of technology helps to some extent, but the most important thing is that software is designed to be accessible from the start.” This frustration in the lack of awareness of employers and designers to make systems accessible was also shared by Annika:

And it's just that I think the biggest problem that I think that all of these things show is that I think disability is not mainstreamed. In large and small organizations and people just don't think. It's not that they are doing, it to stuff persons with visual impairments. But it's just people don't think and they just don't include persons with visual impairment in the design and in the implementation of new programs and new systems and then, often then, when the system is in implemented, then suddenly they realize, oh we have forgotten. (Annika)

Participants also shared examples of where technology or operating systems were changed or upgraded meaning that they were no longer accessible, either permanently or temporarily:

I mentioned technology generally is an enabler, but I think it is a bit of a double edged sword… …people used to work in call centres quite happily. Now, a lot of these things are all digitised, system drove, complicated even sort of logging into desk phones can be can be technologically difficult, just because so many things have become touchscreen enabled without the accessibility catching up. (Tom)

…equipment supplied as technology moves on, and in a timely fashion I'm currently waiting for a new piece of hardware. And it was July that I started talking about it, and it may be here in the middle of this month [February], but then there's a training to go with it, so that you always feel you're playing catch up. (Ruth)

Emily also raised the point that for those who have a progressive eye condition that technology (and other support needs) may change over time and that individuals should “not feel like a burden” when requesting upgrades to equipment.

Duncan also shared an example of where he began a job which had previously employed someone with a vision impairment and although well-meaning the employer tried to pass on this equipment to Duncan:

And the manager, it wasn't really his fault, he was trying to do his best, but he says, a visually impaired guy worked for me a few years ago, I’ve still got the equipment in the basement and he just pulled out all of this antiquated, irrelevant stuff. The CCTV was as big as R2D2 sitting on the desk!! It was the most embarrassing thing! (Duncan)

There was a lack of awareness from the employer that technology may change over the years and as Martin commented there is not a one-size fits all in relation to vision impairment:

Well that's sadly again is a not an uncommon story… …one solution for anyone with a visual impairment. (Martin)

In relation to bulky equipment Ruth also suggested that it may be useful for some people with vision impairment to always use the same desk to avoid lugging around heavy equipment.

Farah also commented that individuals with vision impairment may work harder than their sighted colleagues to achieve the same tasks and that is important to make employers aware if technology does not work correctly or systems are not on a par with other colleagues because it is not the vision impaired individual’s fault:

So it's really important to get proper workplace adjustments and for your colleagues and other staff members to be inclusive, and you know take that into account… …Sometimes you can't avoid using that particular software, but if they know that right, I can use it it's not the most accessible thing, so it might take me longer to do that task they know that now and they're going to account for that. I think that kind of makes me feel a lot better than that, like I’m not being penalized for something that's out of my control. (Farah)

As will also be discussed later in this report, there are particular challenges for those who are self-employed, in particular in accessing information on the specialist support and guidance available for those who are self-employed. Pritika commented:

Well for most of my career I've been self-employed or freelancing so it was more.actually me telling myself what do I need, what I need to do, and what kind of equipment do I need, what kind of support do I need. Which you don't really get much if you're self-employed. (Pritika)

Participants also recognised the need for appropriate training on the technology:

I think another problem is once you've got that kit and support how well do you know how to use it and training on that sort of stuff is pretty expensive. So, whether as part of that getting people ready for work thing it should offer some sort of fairly intensive support and whatever solutions, it is that you're going to be needing. (Tom)

Issues in relation to Access to Work will be discussed more fully later in this report, but Duncan noted that as part of his Access to Work funding he received training in how to use his technology:

So we did an Access to Work application and I got ZoomText for the computer, got a larger monitor and I also had a day's training, training in ZoomText paid for. … I got a whole day's training on it, which was quite expensive because it was at 400 pounds. (Duncan)

As Duncan went on to say this training was crucial to enabling him to work:

It changed my life really when it came to using a computer because I had no idea that such applications were available. And sort of the sheer extent to what they can do. I learnt all the keyboard shortcuts and how to use a keyboard not the mouse to change different things like the size of the magnification. That just enabled me to work really - Access to Work and ZoomText software. (Duncan)

### Theme: Accessibility and disclosure

Accessibility, or the lack of it, particularly in relation to job applications, was identified as a barrier to successful employment:

One of the most basic barriers. I'm still shocked that most job boards are not accessible. Shocking actually. I know that there's not one size fits all but there is accessibility guidelines. (Simon)

I spend hours and hours and hours on the phone to my clients where I'm being their eyes. And I create the passwords and I enter that information and, although I don't mind doing that, as part of my role, but I think it takes that independence away and maybe as an employment adviser I don't necessarily need to know the national insurance number or the passport number. (Gabriella)

In Hazem’s experience he felt that the situation “is definitely getting better”, but that if you do request an application form in an alternative format, “nobody really knows what you're talking about.” This led to a discussion within his focus group about the most appropriate time to disclose their vision impairment (or any other disability). Gabriella suggested that coaching, such as she provides, would be a useful tool in supporting individuals to make decisions on disclosure. In a separate focus group Sana also commented:

Sight loss is an emotional journey that one has to go through. Like well I've got to go through the interview and then I've got to talk about my disability. (Sana)

Tom and Martin, who both worked for the Civil Service, identified that it may be advantageous to sometimes disclose at the application stage, and other times at the interview stage. Tom said, “because some of the larger graduate employees had arrangements whereby that was beneficial.” For example he was allowed him to attend a mock assessment centre, which would not have been available had he not disclosed his vision impairment. Whereas in other circumstances he had not disclosed, preferring to impress potential employers with his experience and application form, and then disclosing at interview.

### Theme: Experience and opportunities

A lack of work experience, particularly in relation to their sighted peers, was identified by participants as a major barrier to successful employment:

I think a major barrier is opportunity. For sighted people gaining work experience is quite straightforward and you can do a variety of work experiences, some of them good, some of them bad. But what they do is they build up a bank of skills which employers value and because of that bank of skills, you then get that break. And you get that first job, and whereas obviously for a blind and visually impaired person and who, maybe hasn't had those opportunities. They are really struggling to compete with the competition that's out there… (John)

Most of the time, particularly if you’re starting at a level entry job, blind and partially sighted people are competing with their peers that would have had the opportunity to have done weekend retail work, whether that be in a supermarket or whether that be in a grocery store or whatever. And that puts them at an advantage over someone like me who wouldn't have had that experience, while I was you know, in education. And you find yourself in the catch 22 because employers want experience and even getting a volunteering opportunity outside of the sight loss sector can be challenging. (Zainab)

Gabriella was keen to stress the importance of voluntary work, particularly for those not in formal employment:

If anybody's doing voluntary work that's kind of a way, not necessarily to that employer, but just showing to an employer, that you are coping and doing stuff and being part of society. Doing voluntary work is so much better than if you're not doing anything. (Gabriella)

One affordance to this, suggested by John, was for employers to offer “meaningful work experience placements to individuals who live with sight loss.” John described this as a “fantastic form of positive action and would really enable people to do well.”

A number of participants also commented on the fact that many individuals with vision impairment tend to work either within the sight loss sector itself, or local government:

I think a lot of persons with visual impairment find jobs in the sight loss sector so that is one place where a lot of persons feel comfortable to work in. (Annika)

In my experience, most people who have employment with sight loss are either working for a large governmental organization or for a charity or working in in local government, or indeed self-employed. In terms of the sort of people working at supermarket, for example, I've yet to see someone with a visual impairment working in a supermarket. (Martin)

Such a focus on narrow fields of employment indicates that sometimes opportunities are not available to all, either directly or indirectly:

You never go into Selfridges and seeing someone who's VI working with a support worker, guiding them, and helping. Why can't you have people who are working in shops, you know, have a support worker that can be the guiding part, what is stopping someone? You know I think there's a real narrowmindedness of a lot of organizations that everyone has said, look and be the same way. (Simon)

Tom for example suggested that the reason why many individuals with vision impairment do not go into the retail sector is such jobs are not so technology enabled:

What's the blindness equivalent job of shelf stacking in Tesco, for instance? Not saying it couldn't be done, but most of these seem to require a lot of those skills and if you don't have an aptitude for those sorts of skills in terms of some of the things you were saying then I think that probably is going to be a barrier to employment.

### Theme: Employer perceptions and VI awareness

The negative perception of individuals with vision impairment by potential employers was seen as a major barrier to employment, this was compounded by a lack of awareness surrounding vision impairment:

There is a big, big hurdle that person's with visual impairment has to overcome, to convince employers that they are able to do the job. And it is a very, very high hurdle. They always say that women has a glass ceiling and that you, you are stuck somewhere, I think, for a blind person the interview is a terrible ceiling. (Annika)

One of the biggest barriers, from my point of view is employer perception. Because if employers haven't seen VI people working anywhere before and they've got a whole list of people... …employers if they have a choice between a VI person and a non VI person, most likely they would pick a non VI person purely because it's a known quantity they've worked with them before. Whereas someone with a visual impairment, they don't know what they're getting themselves into, and you know if it doesn't work out how they can get out of it, I suppose. (Yasir)

Making employers aware of the skills and talents that vision impaired employers can bring to a workplace was identified as means of improving employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment:

Making them aware of the different ways that disabled people can work. I think that would definitely be a better massive improvement, because then it will allow employees to understand that there are barriers in the way but there's ways around those barriers. (Hazem)

We need to raise that awareness and education, just for people to realize Okay, these human beings aren’t completely inept, they have a great wealth of skills that we can utilize and maybe even do things better or in a completely out of the box sort of way and to get the job done. (Farah)

I think it's because of unfamiliarity. And in a lot of cases ignorance… …education is my main bugbear, I think so many employers are just completely unaware of the abilities of people with visual impairments… …and a lot of them I think are scared to inquire. (Martin)

Participants, although recognising their potentially good intentions, were however sceptical of ‘disability confident’ employers:

Often employers would say they are this disability confident employers, which normally means that you are often invited for an interview. But it looks very often like a box ticking exercise and to actually then pass the interview is a very high hurdle. (Annika)

Larger companies have started to get roles advertised, especially within the BBC I've seen Head of Diversity, but I wonder if those roles are really as diverse as they're meant to be and whether disability is actually high on their agenda. (Joanne)

And, and another part, something that I always look into when I was applying for jobs was disability confident employers, but I also realised that that certification was self-certified so it's the company themselves that go through the process and certify themselves and say we are disability confident. I wouldn't say that’s a fool proof system. (Farah)

Farah went on to suggest “I think they probably should be some sort of testing and checks and balances on that certification.”

### Theme: Personalised support

Support that recognised participants’ distinct needs, as an individual with vision impaired individual was seen as an enabler and a strategy to successful employment:

I need specialised assistance, I guess, in some ways, you could say I need more of a person centred plan, than what your regular job seeker would. (Zainab)

Emily remarked, the personalised approach afford her was “really helpful”. Having previously just been given leaflets and websites to look at, she found having a named contact that supported her with CV writing, assessments and mock interviews invaluable:

…it was very much a personalised approach that someone was taking interest in me and what I wanted to do. (Emily)

As a professional John shared his simple but effective strategy of working with individuals to develop a meaningful plan to support their transition into employment developing, “very bespoke plans that gives people a sense of this is what I want to do, but this is how I'm going to get there.” These strategies were developed over one-to-one meetings as the local sight loss charity that he worked for discovered that group employment sessions did not work very well because, “Apart from somebody having a vision impairment actually that's where the similarity ended.”

Greg who was very keen to champion the position of the self-employed commented:

I think moving forward if you're doing more of these focus groups, I think they need to say about self-employment because it's always getting missed too much. They are two separate things, I don't see them as employment, they are self-employment and employment. (Greg)

For Greg, wanting to be self-employed, one of the biggest barriers was that there was “no organisation that represents me really.” He went on to add:

And that was a massive barrier, because people at RNIB didn't do self-employment, people at all these other charities didn't do anything that's the barrier. I went to the Prince's Trust in the end, but they weren’t that clued up on vision impairment. (Greg)

However conversely, Yasir had found the support he had received from mainstream organisations more useful than that from VI specific organisations:

A lot of the advice I have gotten from disability centric organisations and charities hasn't been as useful or as helpful as the advice I've gotten from more broader places. (Yasir)

## Programmatic barriers – Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus

Although there were specific questions regarding the participant’s experiences of Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus, they also emerged organically as topics of concern throughout the focus group discussions. [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers) is a non-means tested government grant which aims to support individuals with a disability of health condition to start or stay in work. Jobcentre Plus is a government-funded agency which provides working-age support. It provides a range of services, including supporting individuals to find employment. Through the analysis we see that these government-funded programmes created additional barriers to employment due to the way that they are designed, administrated and delivered.

Unlike the barriers, enablers and strategies of rehabilitation as mentioned in the previous sections, in relation to Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus whilst recognising at a basic level that they existed to allow a person to work, participants were less able to suggest examples of how these barriers might be overcome. One reason for this might be that as individuals, participants might not want to, or feel able to ‘challenge’ the system, and perhaps this is where the sight loss sector may come together to campaign for individuals with vision impairment.

### Access to Work

#### Theme: A double edged sword

Access to Work was valued by many participants as it provided them with the equipment and services e.g. transport or a support worker to enable them to do their job. However there was always a ‘but’ to people’s comments:

Once it’s set up and it's running smoothly it's fantastic, and there's no way I could work without Access to Work. Because I need eyes in my job. So it's a lifesaver for me, but it is also a big barrier. (Bella)

Let’s work on a positive - great scheme. So great, thank you government that's wonderful, but there's got too many flaws in it. (Sana)

And it's like you've kind of got over all the hurdles and you found yourself a job so you're almost on cloud nine and then Access to Work comes along and kind of brings you down to a place that you don't want to be again. (Zainab)

I like to call it unaccess to work!... …And so my experience with Access to Work, actually my first Access to Work application, was probably my easiest. I had a very good advisor and he was very good and to be fair, he gave me what I needed, so I couldn't really complain. But what I find with Access to Work is just the amount of paperwork that they require. And it's just like are you not worried about all the trees that you're chopping down. Seriously! (Hazem)

And just Access to Work, in general I think is both such a great enabler but also oddly and, in my experience a little bit of a barrier, at the same time, just because it's quite difficult if you've never done it before it's quite a difficult system to navigate. (Farah)

#### Theme: Awareness of Access to Work

A lack of awareness of Access to Work, including what it is, how to apply for it, and what it covers was commonly mentioned as a barrier for individuals with vision impairment:

I think Access to Work is a barrier. The first barrier is, if you don't know about it, you can't access it, so that there's a barrier there already. And a lot of people don't know about it, so therefore they're not accessing anyway, that goes back to the government departments and the way that they promote it. (Greg)

There's not enough knowledge about Access to Work at all, outside a very small bubble if you're lucky to know someone who knows the whole process and what the support worker for is. (Simon)

One of the biggest problems I find, some of my clients don't know about Access to Work, what it is and how it can help them. (Gabriella)

As well as individuals with vision impairment not being aware of Access to Work, employers too were unaware:

…there's so many employers, we work with that have absolutely no idea that it exists. (Emily)

My employer as well, had no idea about Access to Work, so they couldn't really help me either. They don’t know what I needed, so they kind of left me alone with it. (Sana)

It’s an ongoing thing and it's also stress that's the one thing I would say that nobody realises, it’s stressful enough starting a new job, let alone worrying about is it going to be accessible, what equipment do I need? (Simon)

Simon went on to suggest that within an organisation there should be a dedicated member of staff to help new employees access Access to Work.

#### Theme: Accessibility

The lack of accessibility of Access to Work was a major criticism:

I just find it incredibly strange that in the 21st century, you can't send them an application, you can't send them a claim form by email securely. It has to be signed, and it has to be you know I just felt like their processes are still very much in the olden days and they, and it is not accessible [for] visually impaired people at all. (Hazem)

The irony is it's not really accessible. And they're meant to be making work more accessible, so this is absolutely right, so when they send you confirmation of what has been approved, it's in a letter. And there's no option to have it in an email form or audio form or braille they just send it in the letter. When you claim for a support worker you have to fill out a form. And you have to post it off there's no other option, they won't accept it for email there's various reasons they say they weren't accepted for email. (Duncan)

I didn't actually have a good experience when I applied for it. I found it very demeaning in the sense because I couldn't do it on my own, I want to do everything on my own, to be independent and I want to feel independent. That was a serious deficiency with Access to Work. (Annika)

Annika found Access to Work’s lack of accessibility particularly frustrating adding, “I think when any system is not able to be done independently, it is in essence, inaccessible.” She went on to suggest that sight loss charities should look to campaigning to improve the entire process.

Greg went as far as suggesting that the inaccessible nature of Access to Work, albeit recognising that things had changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, is a breach of the Equality Act. He was clear that this too was an area that those involved in supporting individuals with vision impairments should be involved in:

The interesting conundrum with Access to Work, is this process is not accessible itself, you know for claiming back money, for getting sent information in an accessible format and all of this type thing. But all of a sudden during Coronavirus they can accept claim forms via email, which is interesting. And it's also unlawful. What I've always thought is why are none of these big organizations challenging their unlawfulness in that before coronavirus they won't allow you to send your claim forms electronically. Which is breach of the Equality Act, but no one's ever really held them accountable, from a legal perspective, I think. I think that's something that needs to be done, because the Ministers for Disability have been saying for the last 10 years they're going to make it all online and digital and to date that’s still not being done. (Greg)

#### Theme: Delays

As well as the lack of accessibility of the Access to Work process, participants went on to vent their frustrations at the delays that they encountered:

You're supposed to apply for it at least six weeks in advance but you know honestly the job I'm in right now it hasn't come through yet. So I'm working just on my own personal devices. My stuff hasn't appeared at all, my support worker hasn't, then the pandemic is also slowing things down a lot, but I would say it’s a difficult system to navigate. I’ve been there three months now. (Farah)

Right now in still waiting for them to pay me because each day when I go to work I end up paying myself and it's coming up so much. I really want them just to speed up. It was such a nightmare of phone contacting them. They wasn't contacting me. I was contacting them, sending them emails, sending them my claim form, and then they wanted a letter from my employer to confirm if he's not making up the dates or anything. It was not ending!! (Asif)

I only needed the travel to work portion. But it did take quite a while to come in, for me it took about four or five months, so for about four or five months the taxi company that I was using didn't get paid, and that was a bit tricky to navigate in terms of, obviously you employed these people for a particular reason but they're not getting the money. What ended up happening was that for about five or six months, I ended up getting quite a large bill. It was all sorted, in the end, but for the taxi company that wasn't was a great situation to be in. (Yasir)

Yasir also added:

In my city, not many taxi companies will actually accept Access to Work contracts anymore. They know who Access to Work are and they don't like them so they don't want to they want to take those contracts anymore, they don't get paid on time. (Yasir)

Duncan also shared an experience where Access to Work was paying for a colleague to get to work, and it took six months for the taxi company to be paid:

What business can do that?! It's just unbelievable that they have to go through that. They were over the moon when they got their money on time. I’m glad you're over the moon, but you shouldn't have to wait so long. (Duncan)

Yasir and Asif suggested that it would be useful if Access to Work could give an initial advance on the payments so they were not left out of pocket whilst their claim was being processed.

Particularly frustrating was that participants felt that they had no recourse to complain:

How do I put this politely, they give you deadlines and they expect you to meet them, but they never meet your deadlines or your employees deadline is like you're expected to adjust to that. And if you don't meet their responses ‘oh we're going to close your case’. I just find that so wrong. (Zainab)

Simon suggested that as soon as an individual is offered a position the Access to Work application should begin that day. However this in itself is problematic as often an individual will not know their exact needs until they begin in role.

#### Theme: Assessment and application process

Participants also found the assessment and application process a barrier to employment. As Simon mentioned above, knowing what support you need and then having to document it is an onerous task:

It is an absolute nightmare to fill out, you have to really break down every aspect of your job and if you have just started a new job how do you know, how are you meant to what support you need. You’ve literally started in the job you expect us to fill out paragraphs of stuff. What your job is and how many hours you do. Again it's totally depending on if you know someone with expertise to help support you in that. (Simon)

Ruth described the challenges of detailing her working day:

I think it's a three yearly that you have to reapply for it and, like we said before, you have to go into the minute details, down to the minute of what your support worker does for you and your role changes from day to day, so you end up trying to list everything the support workers has ever had to do to support you. You have to make up your fortnight of work in order to demonstrate the support you need, that's quite frustrating, so that can take quite a long time. (Ruth)

Assessment and the application process was however the area in which specialist advice was particularly useful. Gabriella, shared some examples of supportive practice that she used as a professional:

So you only get what you asked for, and if you don't ask for everything they are not going to tell you ‘Oh, do you want a taxi or a support worker’. Jaws, that’s all you’re going to get. So know that example, if I have a client who will be feared that they would be better off having some support worker, maybe 21 hours a week, I asked them to ask for 30 hours a week because access to work will push the numbers down, and then they going to get 24. I do spend loads of my time getting people ready and kind of getting them to grow a thick skin, in order to deal with access to work. (Gabriella)

Gabriella also recommended that people factor in vision impairment awareness training into their application for Access to Work:

So when one of my clients gets paid employment, as part of the Access to Work claim, I always ask them to ask for visual awareness training for their future managers and colleagues. And I tend to, if the client is up for it, I tend to deliver the session with the client… …And I always if, as I said, then the client is happy to take part, I asked them to you know, to take part of the session and talk about their sight loss and what they can see and how they manage it. (Gabriella)

Similarly Ruth and Asif found it somewhat frustrating being offered equipment, by specialists that does not meet their need:

One thing that wasn't good when I'm putting down equipment, they awarded me with a magnifying glass which was really no use to me because I'm totally blind. So they thought oh yeah let's give him that he would be able to manage it, and everything so, then I had to go backwards and forwards and say to them no. (Asif)

They recommend to Supernova which actually turned out not to be suitable for me because I needed the speech, more than any of the large print. So they had to go back to the drawing board and they gave me JAWS, that's a little bit disheartening. (Ruth)

Greg, as a professional, explained how problems with accessing the correct equipment may occur due to the lack of training and expertise in vision impairment from assessors:

…the amount of assessments I've seen where people who've got a visual impairment have been recommended dyslexia software. Which is inappropriate to their needs, but because the assessor hasn't got the knowledge around visual impairment, they recommended the wrong things as well. (Greg)

#### Theme: Human support

In addition to equipment and transport, human support, commonly termed ‘support workers’ by participants, was another source of stress for participants. Sana described managing her support workers “like another job”:

I cannot believe I've finished work and I've got another job, and then I have to support the job and the person who's taking on the role just wants to get on and do the job. (Sana)

She also explained how she had to ask family members to help her complete paperwork associated with the support workers. She also explained having to manage a difficult situation in which her support worker was being paid less than the support workers of her colleagues. Having contacted Access to Work Sana was frustrated to be told, “your bid, your application wasn't that strong” leading her to add:

Because you were able to write more than me, and you're writing is better, but they're all doing the same job. So your one's getting more than this one, and why don't they have this is what we paid for this, this is what we pay. (Sana)

Bella also described having to manage a difficult situation regarding redundancy pay for her support workers:

Because they were gonna be unemployed, and they both were going to sue me, they wanted redundancy pay, it was messy and it was really stressful and really scary so. I think that honestly it made me ill. It made me mentally ill, with the stress. (Bella)

Initially there was no clear guidance on who should fund the redundancy pay – herself, her employers, or Access to Work. As it was causing Bella so much stress she paid the money herself, however with the help of a solicitor it was determined that Access to Work were liable to pay the redundancy money. For future employment this led Bella to use a payroll company to deal with issues of employment with her support workers.

Farah also explained that she used a payroll company as managing employees is a lot of responsibility to have” especially in your first ever paid role:

Because it's very hard for me like my first job to then also be employing somebody else. And I was like oh my God, I have to think about think things like pensions and for somebody else and I haven't even had my first paycheck that that was a very odd experience. Yeah it's a lot of responsibility to have. (Farah)

Support workers also have to be skilled and appropriate for the job. For example Pritkia was shocked to have been provided with a support worker who did not know how to guide. Likewise Ruth explained that it is important to get a good fit between the employee and the support worker:

Very important to get the right type of support worker, in my role because ordinarily I’m traveling around the borough, you want to have somebody that’s sort of good at the admin and support side goes also got a good personality, as you spend a lot of time travelling around together. (Ruth)

#### Theme: Provision

Access to work is not available for internships, voluntary work or work experience, which in itself is a barrier to attaining employment, as Gabriella explained:

Currently, Access to Work, only obviously supports people who are in paid employment, although there is no cap on how much you can work and how much you need to earn. Maybe Access to Work could go down on the work experience route and supporting people, maybe from the age of 15, 16 that will be great. (Gabriella)

Pritika also explained that as a self-employed individual she was not entitled to Access to Work:

I actually wasn't allowed to because I was self-employed at that point, I, from what I understood I wasn't able to get access to work and being self-employed, so I just had to do it on my own. (Pritika)

Farah also had to give up an internship at the Civil Service as there was no funding available for a support worker. This was particularly ironic for Farah as it was a part of a diversity internship programme, as she said, “the word diversity is in the name, so you would think that they would be very good at kind of catering to a range of diverse backgrounds.” Although she was aware that Access to Work does not fund internships she felt that it exemplified the problematic nature of the scheme:

But I found that very peculiar, particularly because this is a government department, which is obviously telling other organizations to be inclusive and be accessible. (Farah)

Duncan and Simon explained how they had managed work arounds to provide support for individuals doing work experience:

The supported internship that I work on, for young people with learning disabilities, you do a supported internship rather than an internship for an academic year, and then you get support to apply for jobs and get the support that you need. It's not essential to have a ECHP, you just put a business case to the local authority. And they can decide whether they're going to fund it or not, I think one of the main provisos, is that your local authority is a good one. There is the luck of where you live. (Duncan)

I have to say what's one thing that you just highlighted, I employed someone, a volunteer who had multi-disabilities actually. And it was just really frustrating for me, she needed support and again it's sort of a chicken and egg situation for her to do more work she needed the access to work support but couldn’t get it as she was a volunteer. (Simon)

Simon also went on to add, “I mean Access to Work, the clue is in the name.” He suggested that there could be some sort of scheme whereby employers could utilise Access to Work for volunteers.

### Jobcentre Plus

Although there were positives from people’s experience with Access to Work in that although participants had many complaints they valued the opportunities it provided, however experiences in relation to Jobcentre Plus all the comments were negative.

#### Theme: Attitudes from staff

The attitude from staff was difficult for participants to bear:

They just see hundreds of people. They don't care about individuals. It’s just a name on a bit of paper and then just trawl through you, next, next, next which group you're going to be in. Like cattle herding really. I can imagine for people that have been on sort of benefits for years for a long period of time, there doesn't seem to be any escape. (Simon)

I would never go back into one. I think they're really bad, I think that staff don't know how to guide or talk to you very well, they just shout and call you. I just find it a horrible demoralizing place to be. Not accessible at all. (Greg)

I don't have any positive things I can say about Jobcentre Plus. Dreadful. (Michael)

I went through this phase where I lost my job and I had to go to the job centre. I told the lady I’ve got a sight condition la dee dah and she expected me to read the newspapers, go on a computer and read all the notices off the board. I was just like I said no, I can't do that, and she kept saying to me but there's nobody here that can help you. And I was just like well I'm never going to get a job because that's exactly what I can't do. I tried to explain it, don't you have any volunteers or support workers, and I think she said something like, ‘but nobody here is disabled.’ (Sana)

#### Theme: The benefits system

Participants felt that they were being written off by through the assumption that they would be ‘better off’ on benefits:

From people that I've worked with there seemed to be a massive, massive amount of complacency. Just stay on this benefit or whatever, and then that seems to almost instil a fear of employment and how they would then lose their benefit. And it seems to be that the Jobcentre very much sells it as figures - this is the amount you get on benefits, this is the amount you get in work or whatever. (Emily)

You know we're more than capable of working, but there is an assumption of we will put you on benefits, and off you go on your merry way. And yeah there are people that works for, but there's plenty of people that that doesn't work for and equally discourages blind and partially sighted people to look for work. (Zainab)

When I first wanted to set up a business, I went [to the Jobcentre] and I said I want to start a business, they were really shocked. And then, they said oh you're you know you're probably better off, you don't need to work really because you're probably better off on the sickness benefits. (Greg)

Yet conversely Simon who was at one time was in receipt of benefits shared how “you have to prove why, you deserve to be on the benefit… …what kind of tyrannical world we live in?!” He was encouraged to ‘play up’ his disability in order to access benefits.

#### Theme: Lack of understanding of vision impairment

The dismissive attitude which participants felt members of staff held, was compounded by their lack of understanding of vision impairment. Having told the adviser that she had a vision impairment Sana was still expected “to read the newspapers, go on a computer and read all the notices off the board.” She also added:

And they really couldn't help me and I got really tired, I was like ‘oh my God I'm never going to get a job’ and they kept giving me pen and paper to write and I tried to explain to them I can write this but I can't read my own handwriting back so we're getting into a vicious circle, and then I suddenly thought this isn't going to work. (Sana)

I have nothing positive to say. Centres have no clue, and I mean absolutely no clue on how to assist a visually impaired person that's looking for employment. (Zainab)

The lack of assistive technology in job centres confirmed to participants that their needs were unimportant:

…I’m never going to get a job I can't see the newspaper, you know the computer didn't have accessible software and I think somebody said well can't you bring somebody from your family in. This is at the job centre, you know this was really crazy and it was really upsetting me and was getting me down. (Sana)

I think that they should have computers, that have assistive technology on as well, maybe, so that people can actually do independent job searches because I know that they used to have the self-service computers right, you can look for a job, but if you've got a visual impairment, then you might need a computer with magnification or screen reader software on it, so you could look for a job if you don't have access to your own computer maybe. (Greg)

Poignantly Greg added, “I think the Jobcentres in a way, give me more drive and determination to want to succeed and not go back to that situation.”

Ruth added that previously there had been specialist advisers “called the blind persons resettlement officer” whereas now disability employment advisors “cover the whole gamut of disabilities” and “they don't have that much experience.”

Staff training was seen as the way forward in improving awareness with John adding that in his opinion it was not that those working in Jobcentres did not care rather it was due to a lack of funding and resources:

It is not the job centre staff wants to be unhelpful towards individuals with sight loss. It is quite simply that they do not have the expertise and that's not me saying that, that was said to me by them, they don't have the expertise and, more importantly, they often don't have the time to go and look for it and so. (John)

This lack of training for advisors, coupled with their desire for it led John to point out whether it is a systematic barrier at the heart of the problem, “Are Department of Work and Pensions really prioritising, not just vision impairment awareness training, but disability awareness training?”

## Future directions – priorities for the future

In the final section of the focus groups, participants were asked to identify any particular gaps in provision in the Greater London area, as well as identifying how the sight loss sector may work with individuals and employers to support individuals with vision impairment into, and to remain in, employment. Three themes were identified:

* leading by example
* mentoring and peer support
* raising awareness of vision impairment

### Theme: Leading by example

Participants encouraged charities and organisation that support individuals with vision impairment to make employment a priority and lead by example in employing individuals with vision impairment:

What I'm going to say can be controversial and not going to name any organizations, but I think we, as the sight loss sector should be leading by example employing blind and partially sighted people all the way from entry level to senior management level. The sight loss sector can't expect others to do something that they're not willing to do for themselves. (Zainab)

First obviously the blindness organizations could start employing some blind people. And it must be difficult for RNIB, to speak with any measure of credibility on employment, for instance, of visually impaired people when their employment of blind people was around about 15% three or four years ago. Which I think the Chair did say was unacceptable but I think that's the problem. (Tom)

We must actually look into why the sight loss sectors not employing more person's with visual impairment. (Annika)

You know, training, development, I think, also there's a real lack of talent spotting in the industry, RNIB don’t have it and [they are] the largest national charity. (Simon)

…every single sight loss organization in the country should have some employment provision. Support for all, not just graduates. (John)

Participants also wanted internships and work experience to be included within the provision of employment opportunities:

The sight loss sector, I think could do more in terms of offering students school work placement opportunities as part of that learning. (Zainab)

### Theme: Mentoring and peer support

Mentoring and peer support was mentioned across all five focus groups as a way to support individuals with vision impairment into employment.

Yeah I think peer support is really important, I think. The power of people with a visual impairment talking to people with a visual impairment and saying you know I've been through this situation, and I've been through that situation, and the program that Michael runs. (Greg)

It would be great if there was a mentoring scheme or something that's more setup. If I had the money I'd do it myself, set something up, you know like coaching, free coaching. For people that are VI to give support, and you know really actual practical help, because one thing I found that. You know people, yes, helping with your CV, but where are the jobs, what jobs are there. (Simon)

…mentoring is definitely a really, really strong argument. (John)

There was recognition that such schemes might already exist in small, localised situations, nevertheless the desire for such schemes was great:

So we do quite a lot of work with the parents, as well as the employers, but also with the child looking, at mentorship and showing them ‘meet this blind lawyer’, this is how he's done it, and this is this is possible does that change your opinion of you know what you take for GCSE, and then what you take for A-level and then whether you go to uni. I think that can really build that confidence. (Emily)

And so I think peer support role models, are really, really important to know what other people do. And linking up with different people as well in different career paths that you want to follow is important, but again it's not hugely done. I know there are certain organizations that do it, but it's quite scarce really. (Greg)

Tom also recognised that such schemes depended on the goodwill of individuals with vision impairment to take on the role of mentor. Similarly, whilst agreeing very much in principal with the idea of mentoring and peer support, Gabriella was keen to highlight that there must be the appropriate systems in place to ensure that mentors undergo the appropriate training.

Yasir shared his experience of a mentorship programme whilst at university studying for a business degree. He was paired with local business owner who provided advice and guidance on issues relating to business. The business owner did not have a vision impairment yet Yasir commented, “I found that was quite useful for me, because you know you're kind of getting experience for someone who's actually in an industry.” Yasir went on to explain that he did not find that the mentor had to have first-hand experience of vision impairment, but instead an understanding and a willingness to share ideas:

I think [mentors] have to have an open mind, so they don't necessarily understand the challenges that I face but they can empathise with the position I’m in. So, while my business mentor wasn't able to say this is JAWS or about IOS voiceover or anything like that he was able to still give me some advice and tips which I found really a lot more helpful than perhaps some of the things, because he had lived experience of owning a business. So I found that his experience was a bit different to the kind of advice and the information I was getting from other VI centric places. (Yasir)

Having heard Yasir share his experience, Martin went on to say:

I think you've hit the nail on the head there. I think you're totally correct. What I was trying to get over was you need someone who is sympathetic to you, it doesn't matter if they're visually impaired themselves. But you need someone who is open, who has an open mind, to be able to say, well, this is what we do this is how I do it, how can we get you to do the same thing. (Martin)

Farah too shared her experience of attending a specialised masterclass in politics whilst at university for students who came from non-standard backgrounds. Speakers at the top of their field talked about their experiences, with Farah commenting, “that was actually incredibly helpful for me, and that wasn’t disability centric at all.”

Zainab thought “having other blind and partially sighted people lead by example is really important”, however she was keen for such a scheme to be able to all, not just younger people:

…there's a lot of mentoring schemes for younger people. But once you hit 25 you're just thrown and left to get on with it, and I think there's a big gap in the sight loss sector where they're not necessarily in terms of mentoring the right people. (Zainab)

### Theme: Raising awareness of vision impairment

Raising awareness of vision impairment, including highlighting the skills and strengths of individuals with vision impairment was seen as a key strategy to improving employment prospects:

So I think if the Vision Foundation can also maybe fund some sort of awareness program amongst disability confident companies, that call themselves disability confident, about what their abilities are and what persons with vision impairment can actually achieve. There seems to be a big belief that many people when you ask a person, any person in the street, do you think a blind person can do your job a lot of them will say no because there's an average belief that people can't. So there’s some sort of awareness campaign funded which can just make it possible for persons with visual impairment, to be able to apply for many things. Because they can do many things, but people don't believe they can. (Annika)

However as Ruth commented it would be great if vision impairment awareness was just part of everyday life, right from a young age:

But it really it should be all through the walk through of your life, there should be more awareness of disability and vision loss from when you first go to nursery school. (Ruth)

Participants identified two ways of doing this, firstly through the provision, by the sight loss sector, of vision impairment training/ courses. Pritika suggested that vision impairment awareness training could become a formal element of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within organisations. Duncan and Farah suggested that such awareness training could ideally be delivered online. Similarly Zainab added:

What I am going to say does that sound quite ambitious, but what would be really good, is if we could encourage employers, as part of their staff development to spend a day or two with a sight loss organisation, so they get that first-hand experience of this is a blind person they are in employment and they're doing all the things actually I do at work as well, but they just do it a little bit differently. (Zainab)

Greg also suggested that instead of going just to employers it may useful to raise awareness from within trade unions and trade associations “there's things like the Association of Teachers and all of those type of thing.” Greg went on to propose that teaching and learning on the theme of disability ought to mandatory for professionals employed in work place practices such as HR, health and safety, occupational health management positions, and that sight loss charities may wish to campaign for this legislation:

You cannot do that job unless you have an element of disability within that course. That's what I'm thinking, more legislative in that way. So it's legislative within the curriculum of these professionals that are going into these roles, so they have a better understanding of how to support these people - what is a reasonable adjustment, what type, what does that look like. (Greg)

Emily suggested that awareness of disability should be included as standard in teacher training, and other degree-level courses:

…if someone's doing a business degree, an economics degree, putting disability modules in there. Putting these into education so that it becomes normalised from an earlier age that people have an understanding of this, this is just reality, there are people like this that I will be working with. (Emily)

Secondly, participants suggested that raising the awareness of vision impairment (along with other disabilities) needs to come from a more direct and formalised approach drawing upon the discourse of the Equality Act, along the lines of what has been achieved by LGBTQ and BAME communities:

I don’t think we can really solve this problem until it’s really looked at. Not just with VI but disability as a whole. I think disability and the word ‘disability’ I think we're 15 years behind any other forms of discrimination. If you weren’t being employed because you're black or BAME, or if you had a different sort of tendencies, or what have you, you know people would pick up on it, but disability generally gets brushed under the carpet that's it it's a taboo and people don't like talking about it. And I think until that kind of thing changes until people are much more open and honest about how we approach employment when it comes to someone who has a visual impairment, for example, and what support they need. (Simon)

There's one thing I've always said, is you can't be what you can't see. So if you don't see people doing these jobs are visually impaired, then you don't think that you can aspire to that and we have a big push at the moment on Equality and Diversity. And it's great that is focused on, but it seems to be only focused on LGBT and Race, which is you know is important, but we're not seeming to focus those agendas on disability as well and visual impairment for that nature. (Greg)

Martin speaking about “black and ethnic minority groups, lesbian, gay and transsexual groups” within the Civil Service, he suggested that there is “a lot to be learned from the way that they are educating their whole department.” He suggested that their “marketing techniques” and “educational models” to raise awareness could be used by those concerned with raising the profile of disability within the workplace.

Emily and Greg however shared a discussion that in fact this awareness should already be there in the workplace as disability is one of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act. Greg said, “the legislation is there, but how many actual people are aware of the legislation as well.” He then also commented:

Equality and diversity is massive, and within that there's nine characteristics and then we've got disability and then within disability you've got all different types. I always feel that we’re sort of the bottom of the chain in terms of what employers’ agendas are. I think awareness is really important, and education and making people, making employers aware of what people can do. (Greg)

Leading Emily to state:

I do definitely agree that policy and legislation plays a massive part in it, but if that were the case, then the Equality Act should do the job it's law. And it doesn't, so I think it is a question of changing attitudes. (Emily)

Similarly in a different focus group Simon commented:

One thing I've noticed that people just don't realize, you know they just think because we're in 2020 [sic] this doesn't happen anymore, discrimination doesn't happen. (Simon)

However as Annika commented, such raising of awareness must lead to meaningful employment and not exist as merely a box-ticking exercise:

[Individuals with vision impairment] will always have to fight harder, glass ceilings will be everywhere, the sticky floors will be everywhere because wherever you are there will be too many people to convince that you are the best candidate and very often you will have to resort to being either the one box ticking employed person. I mean so many of my colleagues say they know they've been employed, because the organization needed to show that they are inclusive and diverse and people don't expect them to perform. They don't expect us to be successful and then are surprised if we are successful and will perform, and I think that is the biggest thing that we must work on. (Annika)

# Conclusions

## Who is at most risk of unemployment and why?

A number of factors were identified through the literature review, which can be used to predict who is most at risk of being unemployed. As noted, many of these factors are fixed, but nevertheless, an understanding of these factors is important when delivering interventions. We can conclude that the following key factors make a person with vision impairment most at risk of being unemployed or economically inactive:

* Having lower qualifications
* Having an additional disability
* Being female
* Having a higher severity of vision impairment
* Having limited skills for accessing information
* Having limited mobility skills
* Not having accepted vision impairment
* Having been unemployed/economically inactive for long period of time
* Living outside of a metropolitan area

Specific factors relating to young adults with a vision impairment were identified by several studies. This aligns with findings from Pavey, Douglas and Corcoron (2008) who identified evidence of an education effect, whereby young people with vision impairment appeared to have improved employment outcomes due to the specialist support that they received during school. Factors of note include:

* Prior work experience
* Expectations in life
* Level of confidence in travelling independently
* Peer social skills

## What types of interventions aimed at individuals with a vision impairment have good outcomes and why?

Our literature search found limited evidence of interventions which can successfully help individuals with vision impairment in accessing employment. This highlights the importance of further research in this area as well as the value of services reporting on the outcomes of the interventions they deliver. Participants of the focus groups also identified a range of interventions which they believed as beneficial for helping individuals with vision impairment in accessing employment Positive interventions include:

* Mentoring schemes
* Supporting the development of computing, communication and self-advocacy skills, recognising that vision can change over time
* Support to help with acceptance of disability, including counselling
* Support to access work placements
* Raising the individuals optimism for the future
* Working with employers to improve their understanding of vision impairment
* Working with non-specialist service providers to equip them to work with individuals with vision impairment
* Conducting work-readiness assessments to offer tailored services to the individual
* Offering early-interventions
* Signposting from Eye Clinic Liaison Officers
* Support to develop social networks

## Are there good employment programmes aimed *not* at individuals with a vision impairment which can be replicated?

A small number of papers were identified which reported on the outcomes of employment interventions aim at individuals with a broad range of disabilities. For this category we focused specifically on interventions which took place within the UK. Positive interventions include:

* Support from personal advisors
* Financial incentives to support transitions into work
* Support offered from larger employers who benefit from having specialist HR departments
* Personalised support from support workers who have been identified as having the necessary skills and expertise to work with the individual
* A responsive welfare benefits system which provide confidence of a rapid return to benefits if required.
* Working with employers to raise awareness of the potential benefits of employing an individual with a disability.
* A reliable funding system for employment programmes.

## What can be done by the vision impairment sector to improve employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment?

The focus group discussions identified a number of steps which can be taken by the vision impairment sector in the UK to help improve employment outcomes. These include:

* Leading by example – employing higher proportions of staff with vision impairment
* Introducing more mentoring programmes, including programmes aimed at older job seekers
* Offering support for individuals wishing to set up their own businesses
* Raising awareness of vision impairment amongst employers (including HR, occupational health and health and safety officers), non-specialist service provides and trade unions.
* Offering bespoke services to meet the broad range of needs of an individual.
* Supporting job seekers in accessing work placements, including offering in-house opportunities
* Offering services for employers to help improve understanding of vision impairment, including vision impairment awareness training sessions.

## What policy changes are needed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment?

The focus group discussions identified several areas in which barriers need to be addressed at a policy level in order to improve outcomes for individuals with vision impairment. These include:

* Providing more protection for job seekers with disabilities to prevent discrimination
* Improved accessibility of the application process, including advertisements, application forms and online tests.
* Improved accessibility of application and claim forms for recipients of Access to Work
* Wider promotion of Access to Work
* Access to Work being made available at an earlier stage, to facilitate work experience, internships and voluntary work
* Improved accessibility of the services offered through Jobcentre Plus
* Addressing low expectations of Jobcentre Plus staff

# Recommendations and key messages for stakeholders

## Recommendations

In response to the findings of this research project, we outline a series of 13 recommendations, under four categories.

* Addressing gaps in evidence
* Improving employment support service provision within the vision impairment sector
* Policy and campaigns
* Priority areas for addressing gaps in services

### Addressing gaps in evidence

1. For providers of vision impairment employment support services to report on the outcomes of their interventions, thus improving knowledge within the sector.

2. For further academic research to be undertaken to improve knowledge of which types of interventions can support individuals with vision impairment into the employment.

### Improving employment support service provision within the vision impairment sector

3. For employment support services to offer a holistic service, addressing the specific needs of the individual. For example, this might include providing technology training, facilitating work experience opportunities, helping the individual’s acceptance of their vision impairment and facilitating the development of self-advocacy skills.

4. For employment support services to offer early interventions for individuals who have lost, or are in danger of losing their job; particularly if they have recently experienced sight loss.

### Policy and campaigns

5. For charities representing persons with vision impairment to lobby for improvements to the accessibility of Access to Work.

6. For charities representing persons with vision impairment to lobby for improved provision through Jobcentre Plus, including raising the aspirations for staff for vision impaired job seekers.

7. For charities representing persons with vision impairment to lobby for employers and recruiters to improve the accessibility of job application processes.

8. For vision impairment charities to lead by example and employ a greater proportion of individuals with vision impairment.

9. For vision impairment charities to identify ways in which to work with employers, trade and professional organisations, and unions to improve understanding of vision impairment.

### Priority areas for addressing gaps in services

10. For vision impairment charities to facilitate individuals with vision impairment to access work experience opportunities, including internships and voluntary placements.

11. Mentoring schemes, including schemes which link vision impaired job seekers with non-disabled employers, as well as with others with a vision impairment. In particular, gaps in mentoring provision for older job seekers (26+) should be addressed.

12. Provision of tailored support for individuals who wish to set up as self-employed.

13. Provision of vision impairment awareness training sessions within the workplace to facilitate the inclusion of vision impaired employees. This can be funded through Access to Work.

## Key messages for stakeholders

Finally in response to the findings of this research project we outline key messages for a range of stakeholders, including:

* Individuals with vision impairment
* Vision impairment sector
* Researchers within the vision impairment sector
* Department for Work and Pensions
* Employers

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* Employers
* Eye clinic staff and health professionals

### Individuals with vision impairment

* Access to Work is an extremely valuable scheme for accessing employment. It can pay for various different types of support, including specialist equipment, adaptations, a support worker and assistance for travel. It can also be used to pay for vision impairment awareness training in your workplace.
* Evidence shows that the earlier individuals with vision impairment connect with employment support services, the better the outcomes they have.

### Vision impairment sector

* There is some frustration amongst the vision impairment community that many organisations within the sector are not leading by example, by employing individuals with vision impairment.
* It is important that individuals with vision impairment are provided tailored support to meet their specific needs. This can be facilitated through an advisor undertaking an assessment of the individual to ascertain in which areas they require support. Vision impairment organisations could work together to deliver services to facilitate this.
* Organisations offering specialist services should evaluate and report on the impact of their services to help inform the sector on which types of interventions are most effective, to address the current gap in evidence.
* Organisations should offer early interventions for individuals who have lost or are in danger of losing their job, and should publicise this to the community they represent.
* One of the primary barriers faced by individuals with vision impaired is a lack of understanding of vision impairment across society. Organisations should work with employers and other organisations like trade unions and Jobcentre Plus to help to address this.
* The vision impairment sector should address current gaps in service, including: mentoring for older adults (26+); guidance for individuals who wish to set up their own businesses; offering more work placement opportunities; and offering vision impairment awareness training in the workplace.

### Researchers within vision impairment sector

* More research is needed to understand which interventions are most successful in supporting individuals with vision impairment in the labour market. This should focus both on interventions to support individuals into employment, and also in remaining in employment. Further research is also needed to investigate outcomes in the context of the intersectionality of other protected characteristics such as race and gender.

### Department for Work and Pensions

* Despite the introduction of the Equality Act, individuals with vision impairment are still facing considerable discrimination when trying to access the labour market.
* Individuals with vision impairment have little confidence in the Disability Confident scheme, and do not believe it has improved their opportunities to access employment.
* Better support is needed for individuals with vision impairment through Jobcentre Plus, including more accessible systems and signposting for specialist support, as well as higher aspirations for individuals with vision impairment in entering/re-entering the labour market.
* Access to Work needs to be more widely prompted to ensure that individuals with vision impairment are aware of the scheme and how it could benefit them. This could include an Access Passport scheme for young adults transitioning through education and into the labour market, and working with Eye Clinics and medical professionals to target those that are diagnosed later in life.
* All Access to Work documentation and forms need to be provided in an accessible format, which can be completed independently without relying on sighted assistance.
* Changes are needed to the Access to Work system to enable the application and assessment process to be completed in a timeframe which will allow the individual to start a new job with the necessary support in place.

### Eye clinic staff and health professionals

* It is important for individuals who are diagnosed with a vision impairment to be signposted towards appropriate services to ensure that they are supported to develop the key skills and knowledge that they will need to adjust to living with sight loss. This can be coordinated through an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer.

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# Appendix

**Summary of Category 1 papers: All working age adults**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Title and citation** | **Methodology** | **Overview of participants/source of data** | **Which factors can determine how likely an individual with vision impairment is to have positive outcomes in the labour market?** | **Author's conclusions and recommendations covering the key messages from the article** |
| Clements, B., Douglas, G., and Pavey, S. “Which Factors Affect the Chances of Paid Employment for Individuals with Visual Impairment in Britain?” Work, 39(1): 21–30. | Multivariate analysis of data collected through Network 1000 project to identify factors which predict employment outcomes of individuals with visual impairment. | Data extracted from the Network 1000 study; a nationally-representative survey of adults who are blind and visually impaired in Britain. From this data set a subsample of 559 registered individuals of working age participants with a visual impairment was identified for the analysis. | **Higher educational attainment** (this variable had the largest effect), **housing tenure** (owning own home rather than renting), **registration status** (less likely to be in employment if registered blind as opposed to partially sighted) and having **additional disabilities** (less likely to be employment if have additional disabilities) have the strongest impact on the likelihood of an individual registered as visually impaired being in work. | The findings underline the need to examine the varying labour market experiences of groups with different types of disability and the importance of assessing the individual effects of severity of visual impairment, age of onset, and presence of additional disabilities. |
| Estrada-Hernández, N., (2008). The Effects of Participant and Service Characteristics on the Employment Outcomes of RSA Consumers with Visual Impairments: A Follow-up on Agency-Type. Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, 39(1): 28-35. | This dataset explored contained demographic and caseload information pertaining to disability, financial, occupational, educational, training, and program-related characteristics of individuals who received services and exited the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program in USA. The employment outcomes of VR consumers with visual impairments were analysed using various statistical techniques. | Participants of this study were 55 % female (n= 7,576) and 45 % male (n= 9,189), and age ranged between 17 and 101 years (M= 52.6, SD= 18.4). 94.1 % (n= 15,772) were classified as having a severe disability and only 9.2 % (n= 1,065) of the participants reported having a secondary disability following their visual impairments. | Positive outcome measured as earning higher wages. Significant factors observed included: being a **younger male**, having **higher levels of education**, receiving **fewer number of services**, **shorter length of time receiving VR services.**  Persons with visual impairments who receive services from **VR agencies for the blind obtain similar employment outcomes as those persons who receive services in integrated VR offices.**  Race/ ethnicity not significant  The **more money spent on vocational rehab service** the higher the eventual wages of service users. | Concluded the need for more intervention-based research. Notes that there are many more variables of interest which should be investigated through future studies. |
| Goertz, Y., Houkes, I., Nijhuis, F. and Bosma, H. (2017). "Factors associated with participation on the competitive labour market of people with visual impairments in The Netherlands." Work-a Journal of Prevention Assessment and Rehabilitation 58(3): 251-261. | Data collected through a cross-sectional telephone survey based on existing (validated) and self-developed scales and items. Logistic regression analysis used to find the strongest predictors of the dichotomous outcome of ‘having paid work on the competitive labour market’ (yes/no). | 229 persons with vision impairment interviewed in 2010. Participants recruited via 2 companies that provide VI equipment | Six factors found to be significantly (p < 0.05) associated with having paid work.  Three personal non-modifiable factors: **level of education**, **comorbidity** and **level of visual impairment**.  Three modifiable factors: **mobility**, **acceptance** and **optimism** | Concluded that factors of optimism, acceptance and mobility should be included in an individual assessment instrument which can provide PVIs and their job coaches with good starting points for improving the labour market situation for ppl with VI.  "It is paramount for job coaches and work psychologists to facilitate the acceptance of being blind or visually impaired." p257 |
| Lee, I. S. and Park, S .K., (2008). "Employment status and predictors among people with visual impairments in South Korea: Results of a National Survey." Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 102(3): 147-159. | Telephone survey of a sample of individuals registered as having a vision impairment. Asked a series of questions to construct a range of variables which might be used to predict employment outcomes. Used a logistic regression to analyse the data. | Aged 18-65, judged as 'capable of working' and registered as having a vision impairment according to guidelines in South Korea. 1004 participants in total, 874 of which met the criteria for this study. | Analysis identified eight independent variables which were significant predictors of employment outcomes. These were: **gender** (men more likely to be employed), **having an undergraduate degree qualification or above**, **living with a partner**, **severity of vision impairment** (less severe associated with higher probability of being in employment), **not having a secondary disability**, having received **'training in communication skills'** (e.g. braille and keyboard skills) and **living in a 'metropolitan area'.**  **Receiving practical support** (i.e. financial assistance to live) showed a negative effect on employment outcomes. | The study concluded that the evidence demonstrated a need for the South Korean government to better vocational rehabilitation programmes for individuals with vision impairment, and in particular for those who have an onset of vision impairment in adulthood. |
| Leonard, R. (2002). "Predictors of job-seeking behavior among persons with visual impairments." Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 96(9): 635-644. | This was a follow up study with 60 individuals who had previously drawn on vocational rehabilitation services but were unemployed afterwards to identify common factors which might explain this. Data collected through semi-structured telephone interviews. Investigated factors which predict job-seeking behaviour. | 60 participants who had engaged with vocational rehabilitation services within the past 5 years, but were not currently in employment. Included 5 who had never been in employment and 55 who had had some employment in the past. | Persons with vision impairment found more likely to be seeking employment if they **did not have another health or physical condition** and if they had been **unemployed for one year or less**. | Concluded that should take the presence of other health and physical conditions into account when delivering rehabilitation programmes. Also concludes that early intervention is important once an individual has become unemployed. |
| Lund, E. M. and J. L. Cmar (2019). "A Systematic Review of Factors Related to Employment Outcomes for Adults with Visual Impairments." Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 113(6): 493-517. | Systematic analysis of quantitative studies which investigated predictors of employment outcomes for adults with vision impairment. Search identified 13 papers which met inclusion criteria. | 13 papers met inclusion criteria. | Demographic and disability variables not identified as significant predictors, **Education level (higher)** associated with positive employment outcomes, positive outcome for **braille readers**, **rehabilitation services** lead to positive outcomes. | Concluded that the evidence base in this area is limited and that more research is required. |
| McDonnall, M.,  Cmar, J. and  McKnight, Z S. (2020). “Service factors and personal characteristics associated with employment and job quality for vocational rehabilitation consumers with combined traumatic brain injury and visual impairment.”  Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 52 (3): 223–238. | Analysis of US Rehabilitation Services Administration Case Service Report data from fiscal years 2013-2015 combined with interviews with vocational rehabilitation workers.  Multilevel modelling was used to determine the predictive ability of nine state/agency-level and 27 individual-level variables. | Data from 880 people (aged 18-65 years old) who had a vision impairment as a primary or secondary disability as a result of a traumatic brain injury (TBI). US study.  51 administrators from all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. 27 states have one vocational rehabilitation agency for ‘all’ disabilities, and 24 have a specific agency that serves just those with VI. | Specific to those with **traumatic brain injury**.  **Increased odds of competitive employment for**:  Higher education levels.  Receipt of three specific of rehabilitation services: (i) job placement assistance, (ii)  job search assistance, and (iii) on-the-job supports  (supported employment).  Competitive employment at application  **Decreased odds of competitive employment for:**  Receipt of disability skills training  Belonging to a minority ethnic group  Longer time spent away from labour market  Being in receipt of SSI (Supplementary Security Income)  Two service strategies were significantly associated with competitive employment: ‘staff with dual expertise’ and ‘staff training on TBI.’ | Having staff with dual expertise in traumatic brain injury and visual impairment was a strong predictor of competitive employment. Educating staff about TBI was also important.  Vocational rehabilitation agencies are encouraged to educate their staff who work with consumers with visual impairment about TBI, including developing expertise in one or more staff member. |
| Shaw, A., and Gold, D. (2011). “Development of a tool for the assessment of employment preparedness specifically for persons who are blind or partially sighted.” Work, 39(1): 49-62. | Literature review to inform content of tool, supported by focus groups with successfully employed people with VI, hiring managers and rehabilitation workers, then enhanced through a survey of persons with vision loss using draft instrument and through factor analyses of their responses. | Two hundred and thirty nine working age adults who are blind or VI | Factor analyses of participants’ responses resulted in 12 scales each of which assessed a different factor related to employment. **Concluded that the tool used was an effective instrument for assessing preparedness for employment.** Scales measures the following: Proficiency with and access to **technology**, tangible and emotional **support** for finding employment, **knowledge and skills around coping with disability**, good **communication skills** (reading, writing and oral communication), **supportive upbringing** with enabled opportunity to **develop pre-employment skills**, **previous work**, **second language** **skills**, **proactive** in looking for work, **ability and willingness to network**, **able to negotiate disability with others** and in particular prospective employers, **tailoring job search** to resume, **the degree to which a person feels supported at work** both emotionally and through provision of accommodations. | Statistical analysis demonstrates that the tool used is an effectives way of measuring work readiness |

**Summary of Category 1 papers: Young adults**

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| **Title and citation** | **Methodology** | **Overview of participants/source of data** | **Which factors can determine how likely an individual with vision impairment is to have positive outcomes in the labour market?** | **Author's conclusions and recommendations covering the key messages from the article** |
| Cmar, J. (2015) “Orientation and Mobility Skills and Outcome Expectations as Predictors of Employment for Young Adults with Visual Impairments.” Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 109(2). | Secondary analysis of several waves of data from the NLTS2 study. Identified various variables from earlier waves which could be used as predictors for employment outcomes now the young people have graduated. | National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), | Factors which improve likelihood of employment include **confidence to travel independently**, as well as **positive outcome expectations** **at a younger age** in the areas of likelihood of getting a paid job, likelihood of being able to support oneself financially and likelihood of being able to live independently. | Transition age young people should be supported to develop essential skills through community-based experiences, and should have access to positive role-models. When planning services to support transition into work, these should be evidence based |
| Lund, E. and Cmar, J. (2020). "A Systematic Review of Factors Related to Employment in Transition-Age Youth With Visual Impairments." Rehabilitation Psychology, 65(2): 122-136. | Systematic review of studies which presented evidence of factors related o employment of transition-age youths with a visual impairment in America. | 10 papers met the inclusion criteria, 9 of which presenting analysis from secondary data sources. | Significant variables identified: (1) previous **work experience** (strongest predictor), (2) **post-secondary education**, (3) **transportation and travel skills**. | Importance of facilitating development of work-related skills and in ensuring that young people with VI are facilitated to obtain higher qualifications. |
| McDonnall, M. (2010). "Factors Predicting Post-High School Employment for Young Adults With Visual Impairments." Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 54(1): 36-45. | Data extracted from National Longitudinal Study of Youth. Constructed two multi-level models, one for young adults from the general population and one for young adults identified as having a visual impairment. Looking to predict future employment outcomes. | Young adults aged 18-23 living in USA, comparing outcomes between young adults from the general population and those who were identified as having a visual impairment. | Variables identified as significant were (1) **number of jobs held as a teenager** - important predictor (variable looked at all jobs with an employer between ages of 14-19), (2) **math and verbal aptitude** (variable constructed with data from an aptitude test) higher score associated with higher number of work hours), (3) **parental support** (participants rated the parental report they received) higher levels of support associated with higher number of work hours), (4) **self-reported health** (variable rated their health from excellent to poor) (better health associated with better outcomes). | Early work experiences was the most important predictor Also significant is the relationship between early parental support and employment outcomes. Whilst this was significant for the general population, there was a particularly strong association found between people with VI in successfully obtaining their employment at the start of their careers. Results indicate work experience during time in education is extremely important for young people with vision impairment. |
| McDonnall, M. (2011). "Predictors of Employment for Youths with Visual Impairments: Findings from the Second National Longitudinal Transition Study." Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 105(8): 453-466. | Secondary analysis of several waves of data from the NLTS2 study. Identified various variables from earlier waves which could be used as predictors for employment outcomes now the young people have graduated. Logistic regression used to predict employment outcomes (measured across two levels - working 20 hours or more per week, working 35 hours or more per week, working less than 20 hours/not at all) | Youths with visual impairment as their primary disability who had post school outcomes recorded. Resulted in a sample of 250 participants who were included in the analysis. | **Early work experiences** and the quantity of previous work experiences a very strong predictor. **Travel** 'how difficult it is for them to get where they want to go'. **Higher qualifications** (important predictor in identifying those who have full time employment). **Good independent travel skills**. **Peer social skills** (particularly for those who were working part time) | Highlights importance of professionals facilitating work experience opportunities and the opportunity for young people to develop networks, as well as helping develop key skills, such as social skills and independent travel skills. |
| McDonnall, M. and O’Mally, J (2012). "Characteristics of Early Work Experiences and Their Association with Future Employment ." Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 106(3): 133-144. | Secondary analysis of four waves of data from the NLTS2 study.  4 questions were analysed with  logistic regression used for questions 1 and 2, an independent t test for question 3 , and chi square for question 4. | Youths with visual impairment as their primary disability who had post school outcomes recorded.  Resulted in 310 participants in total, but data from all participants not used in all of the questions. | **Paid work experience associated with future employment**, however school-sponsored work experiences during high school have little to no impact on obtaining future employment.  **Independently finding a job** and the (longer) **length of previous employment was positively associated with future employment.** And, although at odds with a longer tenure, the **number of paid jobs in the past two years** also predicted future employment.  **Young people who received SSI (Supplementary Security Income) benefits were less likely to be engaged in productive activities**, than those who were not receiving SSI benefits. | **Early work experiences by youths with visual impairments are not equally beneficial**. Need to consider the type of work, how the job was obtained, or how long the job lasted.  **Further research is needed** to explore influence of factors such as parental attitudes, parental/ other adult encouragement, financial need, personal motivation in obtaining early work experiences and identifying characteristics such as skill level and whether the employment was obtained through a transition programme. |
| Pavey, S., Douglas, G., and C. Corcoran (2008). "Transition into Adulthood and Work--Findings from Network 1000." British Journal of Visual Impairment 26(2): 202-216. | Secondary analysis of data from the Network 1000 survey, which collected data from a group of 1000 individuals with vision impairment. Conducted an analysis of a subset of 250 participants who experienced an on-set of their vision impairment during childhood. | Inclusion criteria for participants: (1) had been in compulsory education in past 25 years, (2) onset of visual impairment when under age of 17. This meant that 244 participants were all aged under 42. | **Higher educational attainment** associated with increased likelihood to be in employment, and those who had **lower qualifications more likely to identify as being 'long-term sick and disabled' or 'unemployed'.** |  |

**Summary of Category 2 papers**

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| **Title and citation** | **Methodology** | **Overview of participants/source of data** | **Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation have been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and/or move closer to the labour market? What evidence supports the success (or otherwise) of these interventions and strategies?** | **Author's conclusions and recommendations covering the key messages from the article** |
| Antonelli, K., Steverson, A., and O'Mally, J. (2018). “College graduates with visual impairments: A report on seeking and finding employment.” Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 112(1): 33-45. | Year long, longitudinal study in USA. 26 VI mentee/ mentor pairs and 25 VI individuals in comparison group. | Mentees and comparison group were students aged under 35 with VI. Mentors were employed (or recently retired) adults with VI. | **Mentors with VI supporting students with VI.**  **Few significant group differences**, numerical trends suggest that mentees spent less time on job search activities overall, and submitted slightly fewer job applications, suggesting that **mentees may have been more focused and efficient in their job searches.**  **Mentees may have benefitted from the advice** of their mentors regarding **how and where to seek employment** and **how to prepare for applying for work**, which may have streamlined their efforts.  A greater percentage of mentees than comparison students found jobs by searching on their own; comparison students tended to use employment agencies or recruiters.  Mentees also significantly increased their assertiveness in job hunting by the post-test and this increased assertiveness may have helped mentees to gain the confidence or skills needed to ask about job opportunities on their own.  At post-test no statistically significant differences in the employment outcomes of the mentored group and comparison group.  **Mentors and mentees both found the project valuable** and more than 60% were still in contact one year after the project had finished. | **Evaluation of longer-term mentoring programs** with larger samples is **recommended** in order to examine the lasting effect of career mentoring for college students with visual impairments.  Data trends suggest that there is a **mentoring benefit in transition to employment for visually impaired college students,** despite limited statistical evidence.  The **continued prevalence of frequently identified barriers to employment** has been demonstrated in this study. Students, mentors, service providers, and parents would benefit from remaining acutely aware of these barriers and working toward solutions.  **Evidence of competitive employment in diverse fields** among these college graduates should be encouraging for students and employers, underscoring the fact that **successful employment among this population is attainable and mutually beneficial**. |
| Bell, E. C. (2012) - “Mentoring transition-age youth with blindness.” The Journal of Special Education, 46(3): 170-179. | Participants took part in a 2-year mentoring relationship. Participants completed telephone questionnaires 3 times, pre, mid, and post. | 49 participants in USA registered blind between ages of 16 and 26 years old.  Matched with mentors who had been employed for at least 2 years and had completed a university degree, and/or were near completion of a university under-graduate or graduate degree. To the best extent possible, youth were matched based on gender, career interests, and geo-graphic proximity. | This **mentoring intervention** demonstrated **significant increased efficacy, or confidence** in being prepared to make decisions related to career seeking and decision making.  Participants did have **greater hope** during the 2 years, but not at significant levels.  Very strong effect for **increased positive attitudes** by being involved in the mentoring project.  Gender differences - **males had greater levels of confidence/ efficacy** at the post-test stage than females. | This study provides evidence that youth with blindness benefit when they have access to positive  adults who can serve as mentors.  Special educators and parents should tap into the  resources of successful adults with disabilities who are willing to serve in the role of mentor. |
| Crudden, A., Sansing, W., and Butler, S. (2005). “Overcoming Barriers to Employment: Strategies of Rehabilitation Providers.” Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 99(6): 325-335. | Focus groups with 43 rehabilitation providers in the US. |  | Based on perspective of rehabilitation workers:  **Employers need to be educated about VI and how it affects functioning and there needs to be increased contact between employers and individuals with VI**. Solutions to this include – employer conferences, assistive technology training, employers meeting individuals with VI, training about Americans with Disabilities Act  Employers with no experience hiring people with VI are sometimes **more willing to make their first job offer to a person who is seeking summer or temporary employment**.  **Encourage people with VI to answer the unasked Qs** e.g. about how they get around, do particular tasks, bring your tools and show how you use them.  Rehabilitation provider must be a resource and support system for the individual with VI and the employer. | **Further research on employment barriers for individuals with VI is needed.**  **Need to identify the most effective means of educating employers to reduce attitudinal barriers, which in turn would help direct resources and improve efforts.** |
| Ferronato, L. and Ukovic, A., (2014). “Enabling positive work outcomes for people with low vision: Two case studies.” Work, 47 (3): 381–386. | Two case studies of individuals with VI receiving rehabilitation services in Australia. | **Michael –** 50, stroke, distance vision – 6/18, loss visual field right half of each eye, visual fatigue after 15 mins. Main breadwinner. Prior to stroke worked as electrician. Not able to return to this type of work.  18 months after delivery of holistic range of services – Team Leader in chosen field.  **Ben** – 25, low vision due to Stargardt’s, affecting central vision. Visual acuity 6/30. Reduced depth perception and increased sensitivity to glare. Enjoyed outdoor, manual work but no longer able to work safely and independently.  Range of assessments and interventions, particularly assistive technology – now new role as a cook. | A **range of services and interventions** are needed for job seekers with low vision and to maintain dialogue with individuals throughout.  **Comprehensive low vision and workplace assessment** - needs to be detailed and high quality, taking into account visual acuity, visual field, contrast and glare sensitivity, colour discrimination and oculomotor control. This informs understanding of the implications of an individual’s vision loss and lays the ground-work for appropriate intervention and services, including reading, writing and other near tasks, including computer work and meal preparation.  **Vocational evaluation and planning** - identifies suitable vocational options based on skills, abilities, interests, previous work and education history. Medical, psychosocial and physical/environmental needs and interpersonal skills also important considerations. Evaluation includes a local labour market analysis to ensure that vocations/job options identified are in line with areas of skill shortage or labour market need thus maximising the likelihood of securing work. Skill development requirements are also identified as part of the assessment, for example, the need for any formal training, work experience and computer and keyboard skills.  **Development/ training/provision of compensatory strategies** e.g. additional lighting, screen magnification, contrast strips on stairwells.    Developing **independent and safe travel skills**  **Employer and co-worker training** – once in the role to ‘iron out’ issues e.g. working with a guide dog, keeping stairways clear | People with low vision can **successfully re-enter the**  **labour market through a comprehensive and integrated suite of services** that **recognises and builds on their individual skills and abilities.**  **Thorough assessment** and **tailored interventions** that **target both the individual, employer and the workplace setting** all contribute to **successful work outcomes for people with low vision.** |
| McDonnall, M.,  Cmar, J.,  Lund, E., (2020).  “Comorbid Traumatic Brain Injury and Visual Impairment: Vocational Rehabilitation Service Provision and Agency-Level Outcomes.”  Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 114(1): 6-17. | Analysis of US Rehabilitation Services Administration Case Service Report data from fiscal years 2013-2015 combined with interviews with vocational rehabilitation workers.  Sample size of 51 for statistical analysis based on those who had VI and TBI, and had received vocational rehabilitation support. | 51 administrators from all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. 27 states have one vocational rehabilitation agency for ‘all’ disabilities, and 24 have a specific agency that serves just those with VI. | None of the vocational rehabilitation agencies provided a unique program or  method for providing services to consumers with combined TBI and visual impairment.  Some agencies had a specific method or procedure for providing services to consumers with TBI but nothing unique for those  with TBI and visual impairment.  Competitive employment rates for those with TBI and visual impairment varied dramatically by vocational rehabilitation agency. | At least one member of staff in the rehabilitation agencies should have dual expertise in TBI and VI. |
| Wittich, W., Watanabe, D., Scully, L., and Bergevin, M. (2013)  “Development and Adaptation of an Employment-Integration Program for People Who Are Visually Impaired in Quebec, Canada” Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 107(6): 481-495. | Pilot study of the development and adaptation of a pre-employment program specifically designed for English-speaking visually impaired persons in Quebec (French speaking).  Effectiveness tested pre-programme, post-programme, and 8 months after the programme. | 8 participants with VI. English –speaking. | **Pre-employment programme**  The **most important outcome measure was success in finding employment** within eight months of the conclusion of the project. Five had found employment and, of those, four had maintained employment within the eight-month follow-up period (one full-time, three part-time). Two of those employed part-time had also returned to part-time education. An additional two participants chose to continue their education in order to improve their employability.  Participants’ independence and/ or confidence differ depending on context e.g. someone might feel confident using technology but not so confident talking to peers  As participants became more at ease with themselves and their disability, they became more ready for work, and can focus on the employment search themselves. | **Further research is needed** as the participants in this study were not representative of those likely to take part in this programme e.g. they were more likely to have congenital/ early onset vision impairments, and had fewer training needs.  The **multidisciplinary approach**, with opportunity to observe and share ideas, promoted better understanding of the skills and responsibilities of other team members. It **facilitated shared understanding and language.**  . |

**Summary of Category 3 papers**

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| **Title and citation** | **Methodology** | **Overview of participants/source of data** | **Which interventions and strategies of (re)habilitation in the UK have been successful in helping individuals with vision impairment develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and/or move closer to the labour market? What evidence supports the success (or otherwise) of these interventions and strategies?** | **Author's conclusions and recommendations covering the key messages from the article** |
| Clayton, S.,  Bambra, C.,  Gosling, R.,  Povall, S.,  Misso, K., and  Whitehead, M., (2011). “Assembling the evidence jigsaw: insights from a systematic review of UK studies of individual-focused return to work initiatives for disabled and long-term ill people.” BMC Public Health. 11(1): 170. |  |  | The use of personal advisors and individual case management did help some participants back to work.  Time pressures and job outcome targets influenced advisors to select ‘easier-to-place’ claimants into programmes and also inhibited the development of mutual trust, which was needed for individual case management to work effectively.  Financial incentives can help with lasting transitions into work, but the incentives were often set too low or were too short-term to have an effect.    Many of the studies suffered from selection bias into these programmes of more work-ready claimants. Even though these were national programmes, they had very low awareness and take-up rates, making it unlikely that a population-level impact would be achieved even if effective for participants. | Inclusion on to employment programmes often relies on participants being 'work ready', consequently it is difficult to judge whether the employment effects are a result of personal motivation from individuals or the employment programmes themselves.  The evidence points towards the need for more long-term, sustained and staged support for those furthest from the labour market. |
| Goss, D., Goss, F., and Adam-Smith, D. (2000). “Disability and employment: A comparative critique of UK legislation.” International Journal of Human Resource Management, 11(4): 807-821. | Postal survey 1000 surveys sent 180 responses.  Questions focusing on employer attitudes towards the employment of individuals with disabilities. | 180 employers in southern central England. Typical of service and manufacturing industries in the UK. Public-sector organisations were not contacted. | Disabled employees and job seekers in the UK are likely to have a better chance  of keeping or securing employment with larger employers with a specialist HR department.  Awareness of disability related good practice is least developed in those organisation without specialist HR support. | The DDA is weak as a form of external influence, and alongside an absence of internal impetus for change from dedicated HR personnel, it is likely it will do little to change the marginality of disability issues within smaller organisations (which constitute the majority of UK employers). |
| Lewis, R., Dobbs, L., and Biddle, P.,  (2013). “‘If this wasn’t here I probably wouldn’t be’: disabled workers’ views of employment support.” Disability and Society, 28(8): 1089-1103 | Semi-structured interviews covered: participant’s impairments, employment background, experience of claiming benefits, previous experiences of supported employment, support received through WORKSTEP and aspirations for the future. | 98 WORKSTEP participants, sample of 11 providers selected to represent the range of organisational types and contract sizes across England, Scotland and Wales  Participants in WORKSTEP had to be 'job ready' and able/willing to work 16 hrs a week, but targeted at those with complex needs. Those with complex needs, less likely to fulfil this criteria. | The skills, expertise, and 'fit' of the support worker were key to employment success.  Participants valued the personalised nature of employment support - flexibility, responsiveness  Participants also appreciated the ‘safety net’ approach in that reassurance and support were 'just a phone call away'.  It is important to recognise the quality of employment experiences, and what work might add in terms of personal development, not work at any cost. | A personalised approach to employment support within a social model of disability is crucial when supporting those with disabilities into employment.  Policy interventions that are rooted in a social model analysis of disability are most valuable to disabled workers.  Public policy must be informed by the experiences and views of those people who are most impacted by the policy. |
| Waddington, N., (2004). “The employment of people with disabilities as archivists, records managers, conservators and assistants.” Journal of the Society of Archivists, 25(2): 173-188. | Invited comments from those working in archives, records management and conservation work who were disabled and/or their managers to provide personal reflections. | 15 disabled archivists and/ or their managers.  Participants had a range of disabilities and impairments, working in a variety of roles. | Adjustments can be creative as needed. Not all employees will need adjustments, some may require a lot more. Most situations can be overcome with a little lateral thinking. These adjustments must also exist for social events and (CPD).  Having worked with one disabled employee, employers were felt confident to do it again.  The interview is the preferred time to discuss access requirements, in other words not at the application stage.  There are different challenges, and different ways of supporting those who become disabled, as opposed to those with life-long conditions.  Serious consideration needs to be given to developing/ promoting part-time roles  within the archivist profession. | Persons with disabilities cannot be employed if they do not apply for the role. Serious consideration needs to be given to encouraging those with disabilities to apply.  Regular contact with disability reduces its perception as a problem amongst  non-disabled colleagues. |
| Wistow, R. and  Schneider, J., (2007). “Employment support agencies in the UK: current operation and future development needs.” Health and Social Care in the Community, 15(2): 126-135 | Semi-structured telephone interviews | 31 managers of employment support agencies in the UK | There is a need for reliable, accessible benefits advice in the context of a responsive welfare system based on individual circumstances. Service users and employment officers need to be confident that, if a job does not work out, a return to benefits will be smooth and secure.  Disability services across health, social care, education and transition services all need greater awareness of the scope and aims of supported employment.  Employers should be helped to recognise the benefits e.g. greater staff cohesion, increased productivity of employing people with disabilities.  Supported employment providers require a more stable and reliable funding system.  Effective leadership and parity of resources is needed in order to provide consistent and effective employment services across disability groups and across geographical areas. | Writing in 2007, data collected in 2003-4:  the 2006 Green Paper demonstrates that the UK Government has accepted the need for changes to benefits for people aiming to return to work, and support is required to make this happen. There needs to be time and space for reflection to whether the aspirations of the Green Paper can be achieved without undermining the providers of specialist support particularly in relation to the issues of continuity of funding and Government leadership. |